

**The Embodied Art:**  
**An Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy**

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A thesis  
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## Abstract

This thesis uses present-day aesthetic terminology to elucidate traditional Chinese calligraphic theories. It examines four aspects of Chinese calligraphy: (1) the calligraphic artwork, specifically stone inscriptions, sutra transcriptions, and letters, all of which underwent transformations from utilitarian writings to artistic calligraphy works; (2) calligraphic *xing* (form) and its dependence on *shi* (force; dynamic configuration); (3) calligraphic creation as a psychosomatic process, that is, the coordination between the mind (*xin*) and the hand (*shou*); and (4) appreciation of Chinese calligraphy is identified with the Confucian value of *de* (virtue), and the process of reconstructing the calligrapher's creation of the work.

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## Notes to the Reader

1. Unless otherwise noted, all the translations are by the author. Where possible, quoted translations have been checked against the original.
2. This thesis uses the *pinyin* romanisation of Chinese characters. Where alternative spellings of Chinese names and titles are conventionally used in the West, I have retained these alternative spellings.
3. The names of Chinese people are set in the traditional Chinese fashion: family name followed by given name, except when published using the Western order.
4. All quotations are as the original, and any variation is added in square brackets.
5. In each chapter, dates of historical persons or dynasties are given the first time mentioned.

## Introduction

It was an autumn two decades ago. I was a second-year student in a most ordinary primary school planted in the alluvial plain of rural central China. The schoolhouse was two miles from my village, along narrow country roads sketched like brush strokes between the paddy fields. On the first day of that fall term every student received a calligraphic ink brush and a bottle of prepared ink that emitted a pleasant aroma. Twenty years later I can still recall the smells of that day as I walked home from school; the liquid scent of the prepared ink in my hand and underlying it the mature odour of the golden rice paddy that was about to be harvested.

My first calligraphy teacher, my first Chinese teacher also, was a middle-aged man crippled by polio from an early age. I don't quite remember what he taught in our first calligraphy lesson. But his gestures demonstrating the calligraphic brush strokes in front of the class have lingered in my mind: his back is bent, his left hand trembles involuntarily as he holds the brush, as if every stroke takes all his strength.

The next year, my family moved to a town. The new school I attended had a full-time calligraphy teacher. And there was a full semester of calligraphy; every weekday all of the class copied a piece of model calligraphy for forty minutes. It was my happiest time of a day. This subject was different from my other "core courses" such as Chinese, mathematics, and science. The teacher's lecturing was reduced to the minimum, and with a piece of model calligraphy at my side, I would immerse myself in a practice that relied on the perfect harmony of eyes, mind, and hand.

Back then, calligraphy was not included in the semester examination, probably because most people regarded it as an outdated traditional art. None of my playmates would pick up the writing brush outside the school. But for me it was different, calligraphy felt natural. For a number of years, every evening after dinner, I would open a newspaper, grab a brush, and keep going until the calligraphic lines filled the whole paper. Sometimes, my parents' friends came over, and they always gave me a pat on the back after watching my ink brush writing.



Later, I reflected on what exactly drove me to pick up the brush and practise calligraphy. It was not simply the occasional compliments I got. A famous saying from the Eastern Han scholar-official Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192 AD), which I read when I was a undergraduate student, enlightened me. Cai wrote that the wondrous and the peculiar in calligraphy emerge owing to the suppleness of the brush.<sup>1</sup> I believe, it is the changeful and the uncertain calligraphic materiality – the soft brush, the variations of the ink tones, and the moment when the ink brush touches the permeable rice paper – that captivated my younger self in the very beginning.

In retrospect, calligraphic practice offered me an opportunity and an approach to understanding both myself and China's cultural past. Copying a model example of calligraphy in a fastidious way was like retracing the embodied imprint of the exemplary calligrapher, a man who was usually a literate official in imperial China. I recall how I rejoiced when my brushstroke was comparable to the same stroke in the model, and I would feel depressed if I couldn't communicate the same expressive qualities. I was aware that I needed to clearly discern the tendencies of the dynamic lines in the model calligraphy, and discover ways to express them with the brush in my hand. This was my first direct experience of beauty; the strong aesthetic stimuli it provided would impel me to pick up the brush time after time.

Back then, I didn't appreciate that daily calligraphic practice is like engaging in an enduring and sincere dialogue with the past, and with myself. But that childhood calligraphic training, and the personal, somewhat mystical experience – now I can characterise it as aesthetic experience – did inexorably direct me to study the theory and history of art. Five years ago, when studying for a doctorate first came to my mind, the term *shufa* 書法 (calligraphy) jumped up from the bottom of my heart without hesitation, carrying with it my childhood aesthetic impulse and my distant memory of the mixed scent of the ink and rice paddy. For me, this thesis is both an outcome and a response to these early feelings. My desire to share with you, the reader, my

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese text: 惟筆軟則奇怪生焉。Pan, Yungao, ed. *Hanwei liuchao shuhualun* 漢魏六朝書畫論 (Treatises on Calligraphy and Painting during the Han and the Six Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 45.

contemplation on the aesthetic experience of *shufa*, the premier art form in China, and how Chinese aesthetic minds communicate with the past and the self by means of calligraphy – its form, creation, and appreciation – is in part a desire to share with you the first day of my discovery of the beauty of this most ancient and most beautiful art form.

## Introduction to Chinese Scripts

For those unfamiliar with the history of Chinese scripts, a brief introduction will be useful here. Chinese *shufa* is the calligraphy of the Chinese writing system. That is to say, without Chinese characters, there is no such a thing as the art of Chinese calligraphy. Some scholars held the view that a certain aesthetic appeal of Chinese calligraphy “emanates from the inherent artistry of its characters.”<sup>2</sup> This is also implied in a few paragraphs of my thesis.

A well-known story handed down from the Warring States period (475-221 BC) has it that Chinese characters were invented by Cangjie 倉頡, an official historiographer of the mythological Yellow Emperor who reigned in the third millennium BC. The earliest known form of Chinese writing is found on the bones and shells from the later Shang dynasty (ca. 1600-ca. 1046 BC), known in the West as “oracle-bone inscriptions” that contain, primarily, records of divination.<sup>3</sup>

There are five main calligraphic scripts in China. Before the foundation of the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC), considered as the first dynasty of imperial China, different regions of China used multifarious scripts. The first emperor of Qin unified China, and along with that, the unification of the Chinese script. *Xiaozhuan* 小篆 or the small-seal script was standardised, a script that directly descended from *dazhuan* 大篆 (the great-seal script). Roughly speaking, the Warring States period inscriptions or writings






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<sup>2</sup> Wang, Shizheng. “The Evolution and Artistry of Chinese Characters.” In Ouyang, Zhongshi, and Wen Fong, eds. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 47.

<sup>3</sup> For in-depth discussions on early Chinese inscriptions, see Tsieng, Tsuen-Hsuin. *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962. 19-89.

on bones and bronze, and bamboos and silks can be categorized as *da zhuan*. The small-seal script and the great-seal script, in the history of Chinese calligraphy, are collectively referred to simply as “seal script”. It is the first one of the five main calligraphic scripts (Table 1), the other four being the clerical (*li* 隸), cursive (*cao* 草), regular (*kai* 楷 or *zhen* 真), and running (*xing* 行) scripts. If the oracle-bone and bronze scripts are “named for the materials on which the characters are inscribed”, these five scripts are named for “the forms or functions for which the script was used.”<sup>4</sup> And in general, according to the contemporary sinologist Tsien Tsuen-Hsuein, the calligraphic script “is evolutionary from complex to simple construction, from irregular to stabilized forms, from formal to free lines, and from slow to rapid execution.”<sup>5</sup>

Table 1: Five Scripts of Chinese Calligraphy

Scripts	Example (Chinese character for “sky”, or <i>tian</i> 天)	Period of Origin
seal script ( <i>zhuan</i> )		Pre-Qin and Qin
clerical script ( <i>li</i> )		Qin and Han
cursive script ( <i>cao</i> )		Han
running script ( <i>xing</i> )		Han
regular script ( <i>zhen</i> or <i>kai</i> )		Eastern Han and Wei

Compared to its preceding scripts, the small-seal script became less graphic and more abstract. It features highly standardised characters with well-balanced structure, and with equal breadth of strokes that are allocated equal space, revealing a beauty of rational harmony. During the Qin and then the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), the seal script was mainly used for seals (stamps), monumental stone stelae, and bronze inscriptions.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 183.

The clerical script or *li* first appeared in the Qin dynasty. According to *Yiwen zhi* 藝文志 (Records of Arts and Letters), it originally prevailed among petty officials or prisoners of the Qin,<sup>6</sup> and became mature and extensively used by “men of letters, ranking officials, and practicing calligraphers” during the Han.<sup>7</sup> It features “elongated, side-swaying strokes to emphasize the compositional balance within the single character.”<sup>8</sup> Compared to seal script, the clerical script was a faster way to write; the movements of the brush when writing this script exert a stronger awareness of expressive potential.

The cursive script (*cao*), according to the second-century *Shuowen* Lexicon, originated around the beginning of the Han dynasty. Evolving out of clerical script, cursive script first appeared as an auxiliary style enabling writers to note down things quickly. A simplification of clerical script, the cursive script thus omits or merges some strokes of characters. Cursive script is held to be the script most expressive of calligraphers’ emotions. But even in wild cursive, as Peter Sturman wrote, “the movements of the brush and the abbreviation of characters remain largely governed by rules and conventions.”<sup>9</sup>

The regular script appeared between the Eastern Han (25-220) and the Wei dynasty (220-265). From the third to the fifth century, it was called *zhen* 真 or *zheng* 正, meaning “upright” and “true” writing. And it was not until the later Tang dynasty (618-907) that “*kai shu* became recognized and generally accepted as the definitive term.”<sup>10</sup> The period between the Eastern Han and Tang witnessed the gradual maturity of the regular script. It is the most legible among the five scripts, with its squarely composed characters and clear strokes.<sup>11</sup> Regular script has been traditionally used as the standard

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<sup>6</sup> Ban, Gu, comp.; Yan Shigu, comm. *Han shu* 漢書 (The History of Han). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962. 1721.

<sup>7</sup> Chang, Leon Long-yien, and Peter Miller. *Four Thousand Years of Chinese Calligraphy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. 7. For a discussion of the rise of the clerical script, see Wang, Jingxian. “An Ancient Art Shines: Calligraphy from the Shang through the Han Dynasty.” In Ouyang, Zhongshi, and Wen Fong, eds. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 111-114.

<sup>8</sup> Chang, Leon Long-yien, and Peter Miller. *Four Thousand Years of Chinese Calligraphy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Sturman, Peter. *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Chang, Leon Long-yien, and Peter Miller. *Four Thousand Years of Chinese Calligraphy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Sturman, Peter. *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*. New Haven: Yale University

entry-script in practicing Chinese calligraphy; the basic principles of the art of calligraphy are distinctly manifested in this script. It has also long been used as the standard book script.<sup>12</sup>

The running script (*xing*) can be appreciated as a medium between cursive script and regular script. It is less normalised than regular script but more discernable than cursive script. The running script has two variants: *zhen xing* 真行 (the running-standard script) and *xing cao* 行草 (the running-cursive script). The former is on close terms with the regular script while the latter contains more elements that can be found in the cursive script. A prototype of running script emerged in the Eastern Han, and it fully matured during the Jin dynasty (265-420), when it was practised by famous calligraphers like Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361) and Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344-386).

Therefore, the five calligraphic scripts took shape and became finalised in the first four centuries of the first millennium. After the Jin dynasty, no new script was introduced. The four centuries between the Eastern Han and Jin (25-420) can be entitled the “self-conscious period” of the art of Chinese calligraphy. During this period, skillful handwriting became important for promising official careers, which impelled officials to refine their script and pursue calligraphic beauty. Writing, as Adriana Proser pointed out, “became a means for validating their moral characters and thus for legitimating their influence in government.”<sup>13</sup> The widespread use of paper from the Eastern Han onwards constitutes another favourable material condition for the flourishing of Chinese calligraphy. In addition to that, the earliest theoretical texts on the art of calligraphy appeared in the later Han dynasty, such as Zhao Yi’s 趙壹 (fl. 168-189) *Fei caoshu* 非草書 (Polemic against the Cursive Script) and Cui Yuan’s 崔瑗 (78-143) *Caoshu shi* 草書勢 (The Configuration of Cursive Script). Also in this period, according to the fifth-century calligraphy critic Yu He 虞和, calligraphic works by

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Press, 1997. 13.

<sup>12</sup> Tsien, Tsuen-Hsuein. *Collected Writings on Chinese Culture*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2011.13.

<sup>13</sup> Proser, Adriana G. “Moral Characters: Calligraphy and Bureaucracy in Han China (206 B.C.E.-C.E. 220).” Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1995. 5.

famous calligraphers like Wang Xizhi were collected by imperial courts as well as private collectors.<sup>14</sup>

In China, three art forms – poetry, calligraphy and painting – are commonly known as “the three perfections” (*sanjue* 三絕). The practice of them is believed to represent the highest accomplishment of Chinese intellectuals and artists. It is thus understandable that there is a substantial and substantive body of Chinese literature on these arts. An aesthetics of calligraphy is never independent of other arts in China. Theoretical discourses on various Chinese arts share a significant amount of core terminology, much of which originated in Chinese metaphysics and philosophical anthropology. Different arts in China use different mediums, but there is also no doubt that some fundamental aspects of the creation of various Chinese arts – such as the role of mind and an artist’s perception of external things – have been defined by the same Chinese philosophical outlook. In addition, if we situate Chinese artistic activities within the long-lasting Confucian tradition, it is also uncontroversial that all Chinese arts can be regarded as ways of seeking moral perfection or “self-cultivation” (*xiushen* 修身).

### **Notes on the Approach and the Position of My Thesis**

This thesis studies the aesthetic concerns manifested in classical texts on Chinese calligraphy, and uses, primarily, the method of textual analysis. Where appropriate, the method employed falls into what might be called “cross-cultural aesthetics”. The conception of “cross-cultural aesthetics” is more or less modern, or precisely, twentieth-century. It presupposes that there exist such a discussion of aesthetics or beauty in two or more cultural traditions, here, China and the West. This can be problematic for a number of reasons, for example, in pre-modern China there was no such a term as “aesthetics”, and neither does the discussion of “beauty” feature in Chinese art theory.

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<sup>14</sup> Yu, He. “Lunshu biao” 論書表 (Memorial Discussing Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Hanwei liuchao shuhua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論 (Treatises on Calligraphy and Painting from the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 141-142.

Nevertheless, from an early period, theoretical discourses on all kinds of Chinese cultural productions formed a powerful and successive Chinese aesthetic tradition.

It has become customary for contemporary Chinese scholars who study calligraphic theory – and those who engage in broader Chinese studies – to discuss Chinese issues within a cross-cultural context.<sup>15</sup> Today, to discuss Chinese calligraphy theoretically, it seems, one inevitably has to employ Western aesthetic concepts. It is generally believed that the transformation of discourses on Chinese calligraphy, and Chinese arts at large, started at the turn of century, when some brilliant Chinese minds, such as Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927) and Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927), looked to the West and integrated Western learning into the discussion of Chinese calligraphy.

Though Chinese academia, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, had produced more than a dozen books on aesthetics, none of them seriously consider the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy.<sup>16</sup> It was not until 1931 when the young historian Zhang Yinlin 張蔭麟 (1905-1942) wrote “A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism” (*Zhongguo shuyi piping xue xuyan* 中國書藝批評學序言), the first treatise that critically examined Chinese calligraphy from a perspective of cross-cultural aesthetics. In his “Preface”, Zhang focused on three key issues – aesthetic experience, classification of art, and the formal elements of Chinese calligraphy, quoting directly from some contemporary English books on aesthetics, such as DeWitt H. Parker’s *The Principle of Aesthetics* and Bernard Bosanquet’s *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*.<sup>17</sup>

An introduction and translation of this early twentieth-century proposal for the subject of the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy is appended to the main body of this thesis.

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<sup>15</sup> Notable examples include: Hsiung, Ping-Ming. *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* 中國書法理論體系 (Theories of Chinese Calligraphy). Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002; Jin, Xuezhai. *Zhongguo shufa meixue* 中國書法美學 (Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy). Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion on the emergence of modern calligraphy criticism in the early twentieth century, see Zhu, Shuai. *Cong xixue dongjian dao shuxue zhuanxing* 從西學東漸到書學轉型 (Eastward Advance of Western Learning and the Transformation of the Studies on Calligraphy). Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2014. 114-134.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang, Yinlin. “Zhongguo shuyi piping xue xuyan” 中國書藝批評學序言 (A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism). In Chen, Rucheng, and Li Xinrong, eds. *Zhang Yinlin quanji* 張蔭麟全集 (The Complete Collected Works of Zhang Yinlin). Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2013. 1177-1192.

Between us – Zhang’s “Preface” and my thesis – came more than twenty monographs on the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy, most published in mainland China during the 1970s and 1990s.<sup>18</sup> In writing this thesis, I’m fully aware of these texts, on which the subject of calligraphy aesthetics is founded. I’m also well aware of the deficiencies in them. The fact is, since the late 1980s, some Chinese aestheticians started to critically reflect on the contemporary endeavours to analyse calligraphy from a perspective of cross-cultural aesthetics. A widely held view is that these new aesthetic discourses on calligraphy diverged from traditional Chinese artistic practice and criticism.<sup>19</sup> As the contemporary philosopher Li Zehou put it:

Some foreign scholars and critics have employed a Western theoretical framework to analyse Chinese theories of literature and art. James J. Y. Liu, for example, set out six types of Chinese literary theory... Xiong Bingming suggests that “if we take into account all the theories of calligraphy that have arisen since ancient times, they may be classed into six great systems,” namely, the schools of “realism,” “pure formalism,” “sentimentalism,” “ethicism,” “naturalism,” and “Chan sense.” Both of these categorizations are worthy of study, but both fall short of accuracy, and in fact seem a bit forced. They fail, in the end, to articulate the true spirit of Chinese art. To truly understand and explain in present-day theoretical terminology the highly intuitive and inclusive Chinese aesthetics and its categories will be a long and involved process.<sup>20</sup>

Taking on this challenge, this thesis – arguably the first systematic study on the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy in English – aims at using present-day aesthetic terminology to elucidate traditional Chinese calligraphic theories. In the English

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<sup>18</sup> For a list of and a critical discussion on these monographs, see Jian, Yuejuan. “Zhongguo jin xian dai shufa meixue jiangou zhi yanjiu” 中國近現代書法美學建構之研究 (A Study on the Establishment of Modern Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy). Ph.D. diss., National Chengchi University, 2004. 123-239.

<sup>19</sup> Jin, Xuezhai. *Zhongguo shufa meixue* 中國書法美學 (Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy). Nanjing: Jiangsu wenyi chubanshe, 1994. 456.

<sup>20</sup> Li, Zehou; Majia Bell Samei, trans. *The Chinese Aesthetic Tradition*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010. 221.



academia, much attention has been given to the writings on Chinese literature and painting, which is reflected by a large repertoire of academic productions.<sup>21</sup> By comparison, there is a scarcity of English scholarship on Chinese calligraphic theory. Though as early as in 1938, the renowned artist and writer Chiang Yee published *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to Its Aesthetics and Technique* – the first detailed English monograph on Chinese calligraphy – his book laid particular emphasis on calligraphic techniques, such as the use of the brush and the composition of Chinese characters. There is only one chapter, in Chiang’s book, that briefly discusses the aesthetic principles behind calligraphic creativity.<sup>22</sup> This thesis is an endeavour to make a meaningful contribution to this rather neglected field in English academia.

To study classical calligraphic discourses cross-culturally, this thesis understands, one needs to obey the true spirit of Chinese calligraphy on one hand, and on the other hand, enter into dialogue with Western aesthetics where appropriate. In the conception of several chapters, I start with similar concerns that attract both Chinese and Western art theorists, such as artistic form, the nature of artistic creativity, and the process of aesthetic appreciation. Contemporary aestheticians who believe art to be “a cultural universal”, Denis Dutton for example, might take them as universal aesthetic interests.<sup>23</sup> But when it comes to the meanings of specific Chinese aesthetic categories, this thesis finds that they are often essentially different from those of the Western aesthetic discourse. In a way, this thesis complicates the postulate of aesthetic universalism.

In this thesis, from chapter two to chapter six, I select a number of critical concepts that are pervasive in classical Chinese texts on calligraphy, and that represent a particular aspect of the aesthetic concerns of this art, such as *xingshi* 形勢 (calligraphic form and force-form) and *xinshou* 心手 (the mind and the hand). A

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<sup>21</sup> For an annotated list of books and articles on Chinese literary theory and criticism, see Bizais-Lillig, Marie. “Traditional Criticism”. In *Oxford Bibliographies in Chinese Studies*. <<http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199920082/obo-9780199920082-0116.xml>>. For a list of books and articles on the theory of Chinese painting, see Bush, Susan, and Hsio-Yen Shih, comps. and eds. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 371-374.

<sup>22</sup> Chiang, Yee. *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Dutton, Denis. “Aesthetic Universals.” In Gaut, Berys, and Dominic M. Lopes, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001. 203.

considerable part of my thesis is devoted to the discussion of these calligraphic concepts in a Chinese cultural context. Where appropriate, I compare them with ideas in Western aesthetics. Western aesthetic theories, from time to time, enlighten our understanding of Chinese artistic terms. Drawing from different philosophical traditions in this way, in the words of the contemporary philosopher Li Chenyang, “gives us different perspectives and sheds new light on issues in any particular tradition, and it can help open our minds and generate new and creative insights.”<sup>24</sup>

By using these key “alien concepts”, I don’t intend to create a distance, or strangeness, for an English reader who wants to understand this art. The intention is just the opposite, if one recalls the justifications Michael Baxandall provided for using old alien words in the study of other-cultural minds. First, old words can provide access to the thinking of another culture, by means of which we can “link our minds with theirs”; second, using another culture’s old words “is a sort of linguistic declaration of our separation from another culture’s thinking”: it highlights essential differences in fundamental ways of thinking; and third, old words from another culture can be stimulating.<sup>25</sup> I hope that the old Chinese words used in this thesis can be a tool, by means of which a Western aesthetic mind may be able to “group a set of related qualities” in Chinese calligraphy.<sup>26</sup> And my interpretation of these old words reveals an “intentional mode” in which Chinese scholar-artists operate aesthetic discussions.

## Outline of Chapters

In his influential book, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, M. H. Abrams wrote that “four elements in the total situation of a work of art are discriminated and made salient, by one or another synonym, in almost all theories which aim to be comprehensive”, i.e., the *work*, the *artist*, the *audience*, and *universe*.<sup>27</sup> This thesis consciously organises the

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<sup>24</sup> Li, Chenyang. *The Tao Encounters the West: Explorations in Comparative Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999. 5.

<sup>25</sup> Baxandall, Michael. *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanation of Pictures*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985. 113-116.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> Abrams, M. H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford

aesthetic concerns of Chinese calligraphic discourses around these elements. Specifically, I examine four aspects of Chinese calligraphy: the calligraphic artwork, calligraphic form, calligraphic creation, and calligraphic appreciation and evaluation. If, as Abrams asserted, all reasonably adequate theories “exhibit a discernable orientation towards one” of these co-ordinates,<sup>28</sup> my thesis can be characterised as orientating towards the subject of artistic creation, i.e., the calligrapher. Implied in this orientation is the idea that a piece of Chinese calligraphy can be regarded as the embodiment of the calligrapher’s mind and body.

The first chapter explains the calligraphic genres. What is a Chinese work of art, or specifically, artwork of calligraphy? With this question in mind, the first chapter starts with different approaches to defining artwork in Western aesthetics. A Western aesthetic mind might find it hard to believe calligraphy (*shufa*) can become a major art in China. Though writing of the Western alphabetic scripts, in the words of Edward Johnston, “has a beauty of its own”,<sup>29</sup> it has not become a main art form in the West, and few paid attention to its aesthetic qualities. A useful way to confront the sceptics of Chinese calligraphic art, or more generally, non-Western art, I contend in Chapter One, is to return to the concrete works, and examine the atmosphere of its practice as well as the theories which aim to explain it. The main body of this chapter discusses the three historically important types of calligraphy – stone inscriptions, sutra transcriptions, and letters, focusing on their respective historical trajectories. And in so doing, I present a Chinese notion of (calligraphic) “artwork” in a pre-modern Chinese context. This chapter also points to the fact that some types of artefacts in China go through a process of becoming “artworks”. That is to say, these three genres – stone inscription, sutra transcriptions, and letters – all underwent a certain transformation from utilitarian writings to artistic calligraphy works. This chapter, in addition, achieves the purpose of presenting a short history of Chinese calligraphy, useful for readers unfamiliar with the art. Thus, in terms of methodology, it is not closely allied with the following chapters.

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University Press, 1953. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Johnston, Edward, and Noel Rooke. *Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering*. London: Pitman, 1932. xiv.

The second chapter explains the form (*xing* 形) of Chinese calligraphy, proposing that the calligraphic *xing* (form) is inseparable from *shi* 勢 (force), a key aesthetic concept in Chinese calligraphy criticism and Chinese aesthetics at large. The chapter starts with a discussion of *xing* in early Chinese aesthetic discourses, before turning to the term's usages in texts on calligraphy. The second and third parts discuss the aesthetic term *shi* as it is used in classical calligraphic theory, explicating how calligraphic *shi*, as a kind of directional force or dynamism, persists through the three aspects of calligraphic form, i.e., brushstrokes, characters and compositional structure. I demonstrate that calligraphic *xing* and *shi* are mutually dependent. On one hand, the calligraphic *shi*, as an aesthetic effect, is attached to the visible *xing*. On the other hand, the forms of successful calligraphic works are never static, rather they should be filled with internal force (*shi*). The chapter concludes by making an analogy between Chinese calligraphic force-form and the artistic “living form” in the sense given it by Susanne Langer, suggesting that stress on the force of artistic form is not unique to Chinese aesthetic discourse.

The third and the fourth chapters explain calligraphic creation and creativity. Due to the fact that there is a general aesthetic preference for antiquities, a reverence towards the past in Chinese art discourse, the third chapter starts with the issue of the past or *gu* 古 in calligraphic practice, and the role of tradition as it is related to creativity or originality in Western art theory and literary criticism. For the main part of the chapter, I address three questions: Why is the past so important in Chinese calligraphy, or in Chinese art at large? How do Chinese calligraphers learn from the past? And, is the importance attached to the past an obstacle for Chinese calligraphers' artistic creation? The importance of the past was rooted, according to the American sinologist Frederick W. Mote, in an apparent anomaly of Chinese civilisation, in which “the defining criteria for value were inescapably governed by past models, not by present experience or by future ideal states of existence.”<sup>30</sup> Specifically, in calligraphic practice, *linmo* 臨摹

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<sup>30</sup> Mote, Frederick W. “The Arts and the ‘Theorizing Mode’ of the Civilization.” In Murck, Christian F., ed. *Artists and Traditions: Uses of the Past in Chinese Culture*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1976. 6.

(copying) and *dutie* 讀帖 (reading and contemplating the master's original work) are the two main approaches to past models. And it is a ubiquitous tenet in calligraphy criticism that grasping the excellence of preceding masterpieces is a prerequisite to achieving freedom or creating one's own style. This leads us to ponder the idea of *tongbian* 通變 in calligraphy criticism, a term that can be translated either as "continuity through change" or "change through continuity". The former translation highlights that the continuity of calligraphy history lies in the creativity of calligraphers of the successive dynasties, while the latter stresses that any creation or innovation in this art lies in the reverence for – and the study of – the past.

Chapter Four is long. However, this is necessary because the explication of calligraphic creation is of central importance for my main thesis. This chapter seeks to demonstrate that Chinese calligraphic creation is a psychosomatic process. This psychosomatic feature is suggested by the pervasive artistic terms in calligraphy criticism that bind together *xin* 心 (mind-heart) and *shou* 手 (hand), such as *xin shou shuang chang* 心手雙暢 (mind and hand acting in harmony), and *miao zai xin shou* 妙在心手 (the subtlety lies in mind and hand). Terms like these indicate that successful calligraphic creation or creativity lies in the coordination, the configural congruity, between the mind and the body. Thus, the main body of this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part examines the role of *xin* (mind) and psychological states – *guan* 觀 (perception), *qing* 情 (emotion), and *yi* 意 (intention; idea), contending that these aspects of the calligrapher's mind mix together and generate an "aesthetic idea", which can then be realised by virtue of the calligrapher's bodily movement.<sup>31</sup> The second part focuses on the bodily movement of a Chinese calligrapher, elaborating on a somaesthetics of ink brush writing. And it is a tenet of this somaesthetics that in calligraphic creation the artist's bodily memory of particular lines stimulates particular movements which are then embodied in the brush's linear progression.

The fifth and the sixth chapter explain calligraphic appreciation and evaluation.

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<sup>31</sup> A revised version of the section on the concept of *yi* has been published in the journal *Philosophy East and West*. Shi, Xiongbo. "The Aesthetic Concept of *Yi* in Chinese Calligraphic Creation." *Philosophy East and West*, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.0.0127>

Traditional Chinese calligraphic criticism has developed two approaches or attitudes to the appreciation and evaluation of calligraphic works: one, to appreciate the beauty of the calligraphic work; two, to go beyond the artwork, and appraise the calligrapher. The fifth chapter deals with the latter approach, explaining an ethico-aesthetic attitude in the appraisal of this art. It is a notable feature of classical calligraphy criticism that the evaluation of calligraphy often involves the evaluation of the person. Around this feature, chapter five is concerned with two topics – *ren shu guanxi* 人書關係 (relation between an artist and his/her calligraphy), and the theory of *pin* 品 (grading or classification). Specifically, two ideas – *shu ru qiren* 書如其人 (calligraphy is like the person), and *shupin ji renpin* 書品即人品 (the judgement of calligraphy echoes the moral judgement of the person) – encapsulate the relationship between the evaluation of calligraphy and that of the creative subject. Since the late Tang dynasty, there has been a tendency to evaluate the aesthetic qualities of one's calligraphy in direct reference to his or her moral rectitude. And for critics and connoisseurs who adopt such a “moralistic” stance, the moral character of a calligrapher prevails over the aesthetic qualities in the evaluation of his or her calligraphy. Misgivings about this moralistic approach have been expressed by a few prominent calligraphy theorists such as Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) and Wu Dexuan 吳德旋 (1767-1840), who called into question the proposition that a person's character can be revealed in his or her calligraphy, and challenged the moralist view that good calligraphy is necessarily produced by morally worthy calligraphers. The second section of this chapter discusses an important paradigm in Chinese calligraphic evaluation, one which can be identified as an efficacious framework, the gradation (*pin* 品) of both Chinese calligraphers and their calligraphy. The Chinese tradition of *pin* or evaluative classification is, as Yolain Escande noted, “closely related to the centuries-old practice of judging and ranking human beings, especially officials.”<sup>32</sup> The four common categories (or four *pin*) in the calligraphic ranking system – *shen* 神 (divine or inspired), *miao* 妙 (marvellous),

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<sup>32</sup> Escande, Yolaine. “Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan's *Shudian*.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 149.

*neng* 能 (competent), and *yi* 逸 (unconstrained) – are discussed in their original contexts. And elaborating on this classification system, I suggest that the system of *pin* constitutes a unique value matrix in Chinese art discourse, by means of which Chinese scholars, connoisseurs, and art critics assess and rank the cultural, economic, and aesthetic values of different types of paintings and calligraphic works.

The last chapter turns to the other attitude adopted by the Chinese literati towards calligraphy, an attitude that focuses on the appreciation of beauty in a calligraphic work per se. As appreciation consists in bringing an appropriate aesthetic object into awareness, this chapter starts with the perceptual object in the appreciation of calligraphy. Though, generally speaking, all calligraphic creations are based on written characters, we cannot identify the aesthetic object of a calligraphic work as the Chinese characters. I make a differentiation between the physical presence of the characters employed in a calligraphic work and the semantic content of them, demonstrating that an aesthetic experience of calligraphic works is a matter of attending to the graphical patterns of the characters. More specifically, I contend that calligraphic appreciation involves bringing into awareness calligraphic works' brushwork or formal qualities and their spiritual or inner qualities. Such a twofoldness is analogous to what Noël Carroll understood as the object of aesthetic experience, i.e. the formal and expressive properties.<sup>33</sup> The remainder of the chapter explores further the process of coming to understand calligraphic works and the characteristics of such a process. I propose that calligraphic appreciation can be understood as a process of *retrieval*, a term I take from Richard Wollheim. To view calligraphic criticism or appreciation as *retrieval* is, in a sense, to take the creative process as the critical object.<sup>34</sup> And only if the viewer starts to put her- or himself in the position of the creator, and reproduces in her or his mind the actual creative process, the linear progression, the linkage between the brushstrokes, a calligraphic work is open to understanding. This chapter also explores a recurring

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<sup>33</sup> Carroll, Noël. "Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience." *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* 70.2 (2012): 173.

<sup>34</sup> Wollheim, Richard. *Art and Its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 185.

topic in calligraphy criticism – whether a trained calligrapher is an ideal critic, arguing that calligraphy appreciators who have accumulated experience of *yongbi* 用筆, i.e., wielding the brush themselves, are naturally better able to grasp other people's *yongbi* (the linear qualities) manifested in their calligraphic works. Successful calligraphic creation, as I discuss in the fourth chapter, necessitates a particular somatic consciousness of this art, and likewise, proper calligraphic appreciation resorts to the kinesthetic experience one accumulates, chiefly, if not only, through calligraphic practice.



## Chapter 1

### Casual Letters from Famous Calligraphers are Sure to be Treasured

(*chidu bi zhen* 尺牘必珍)

What is “art” in China? Landscape paintings, Emperor Huizong’s calligraphies, Buddhist sculptures, porcelain plates, and other things alike would be called “Chinese works of art”, or, “works of Chinese art”. But, a list like this does not settle the issue of “what is Chinese art”. As a response to the question, Craig Clunas wrote in the opening paragraph of his *Art in China*:

No one in China before the nineteenth century saw all these objects as constituting part of the same field of enquiry, despite the existence of a long and sophisticated tradition of writing about art, collecting art, and showing and consuming art by successive elites within that country. Rather it was in nineteenth-century Europe and North America that “Chinese Art” was created.<sup>1</sup>

Clunas’s statement conveys two points: first, although China’s cultural tradition has no such term that equates to the Western word “art”, Chinese people, especially political and cultural elites, are no strangers to what they would collectively count as works of art. Recording and evaluating famous “artworks” has long been a tradition of Chinese art writing. As early as in the ninth-century book *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Record of Famous Painters through the Ages), the Tang art historian Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 recorded some famous works of paintings from previous dynasties. Second, the English language entity of “Chinese art” was established under an occidental context by prestigious art scholars such as Franz Wickhoff (1853-1909) and

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<sup>1</sup> Clunas, Craig. *Art in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 9.

Bernard Berenson (1865-1959).<sup>2</sup>

It's challenging to understand what exactly was in their minds, when Wickhoff and Berenson talked about "Chinese art" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What we know with some confidence is that their understanding of art was built upon a Western aesthetic tradition. In such a tradition, "it is a necessary condition for something's being an artwork that it (be intended to) possess the capacity to generate aesthetic experience," as Stephen Davies wrote.<sup>3</sup> In such a tradition, representational theorists claim that an artwork is an imitation of something, while expression theories declare that a work of art is an expression of an artist's emotion. The former has its origin in the writings of Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, and in later times was repeated by such writers like Leon Battista Alberti, Francis Hutcheson, and Charles Batteux; the latter theory thrived in the nineteenth century and carried forward to the twentieth century, in virtue of the writings of representative figures like William Wordsworth, Leo Tolstoy, Benedetto Croce, R. G. Collingwood, and Susan Langer. Also, in such a tradition, "Significant Form", Clive Bell claimed, "is the one quality common to all works of visual art."<sup>4</sup> Art historians like Franz Wickhoff and Bernard Berenson were clearly familiar with these Western aesthetic theories.

What they were not familiar with, of course, was another approach to define the work of art that developed after the mid-twentieth century, an approach Davies calls proceduralism. George Dickie's "institutional theory" is one of the most famous procedural definitions. According to his late institutional account of art, "a work of art in the classificatory sense is (1) an artifact (2) a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)."<sup>5</sup> According to Dickie, the conferring of the status of art is a core issue for this procedural definition. Some

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the early introduction of Chinese art to the Western world, see Clunas, Craig. "The Art of Global Comparisons." In Berg, Maxine, ed. *Writing the History of the Global*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 165-176.

<sup>3</sup> Davies, Stephen. "Functional and Procedural Definitions of Art." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 24.2 (1990): 99.

<sup>4</sup> Bell, Clive, and J. B. Bullen. *Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987. 8

<sup>5</sup> Dickie, George. *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1974. 34.

authorities decide whether something is a work of art, and these authorities are granted by the people within the “artworld”.

Whether in a Chinese cultural tradition or under the scrutiny of Western art definitions, works of Chinese calligraphy are and should be regarded as works of art. Over the last millennium, Chinese elite definitions of art, as Clunas observed, “have always given first place to calligraphy, though English-language surveys often tend to devote less space to this than they do to sculpture.”<sup>6</sup> An underestimation of Chinese calligraphy is partly due to the inadequate English term “calligraphy” as a translation of Chinese handwriting, partly due to the fact that writing of the Western alphabetic scripts, though “has a beauty of its own”, has not become a main art form in the West, and few paid attention to its aesthetic qualities.<sup>7</sup>

A way to confront the sceptics of Chinese calligraphic art, or more generally, non-Western art, is to return to the concrete works, and examine the atmosphere of their practice as well as theories used to explain them (in the sense of Arthur Danto). In this chapter, I will discuss three types of calligraphic works: stone inscriptions, sutra transcriptions, and letters, focusing on their respective trajectories and their relationship to calligraphy history. Given their own distinct backgrounds, a discussion of these calligraphy genres inevitably involves some related issues, such as the identity of their makers/creators, their literary content, their reception, as well as their formal characteristics.

### 1.1 Stone inscriptions and rubbings

Before the invention of paper, stone was one of the most favourable physical mediums to record human activities in many civilisations of the world. In China, stone inscriptions have many types: stele 碑 (*bei*), epitaph 墓志銘 (*muzhi ming*), cliff inscription 摩崖 (*moya*), record of making images 造像記 (*zaoxiang ji*), stone

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<sup>6</sup> Clunas, Craig. *Art in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Johnston, Edward, and Noel Rooke. *Writing & Illuminating, & Lettering*. London: Pitman, 1932. xiv.

classics 石經 (*shijing*), etc. The number of stone inscriptions in China is considerable; more than 8000 stone inscriptions were chronicled in the mid-Qing dynasty book *Record of Visits to Steles in China* 寰宇訪碑錄 (*Huanyu fangbei lu*). They constitute an extensive repertoire for later researchers in the field of archaeology, history, literature and art.

Considering the multitude of types of stone inscriptions and their intimacy with Chinese calligraphy, this section focuses on one of the most common formats – stone stele inscriptions. To understand the relationship between stele (*bei*) and Chinese calligraphy, it is beneficial to review the two contrasting schools or traditions in calligraphy history: *tiexue* 帖學 (school based on *tie*) and *beixue* 碑學 (school based on *bei*). In terms of the physical medium, *bei* and *tie* represent two kinds of writing material: *bei*, as indicated, refers to stone stelae with inscriptions, while *tie* 帖, originally meaning “note”, denotes handwritings on paper or silk. In discussing the differences between *bei* and *tie*, Lothar Ledderose wrote:

The great works of calligraphy of the Han dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) were all monumental inscriptions engraved on stone stelae (*bei*).……It was one of the many epoch-making trends of the Six Dynasty period that artistic attention began to shift away from stone inscriptions and focused instead on small pieces of writing on paper and silk, such as personal letters. These were called *tie*.<sup>8</sup>

In Chinese calligraphy history, *tie* and *bei* constitute two repertoires of practising models; every calligrapher started his or her writing practice with an imitation or copying of the earlier masters whose works are preserved by virtue of these two mediums. The great *tie*, represented by the handwritten pieces of the Two Wangs – Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361) and his son Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344-386) – in the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420), dominated the development of Chinese calligraphy

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<sup>8</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 10.

history for twelve centuries, which is generally referred to “the school based on *tie*”, or in the words of Ledderose, the “classical tradition”.

But for ordinary calligraphy trainees, original *tie* are hard to obtain, for most great *tie* are possessed by cultural elites and royal families. Making copies naturally emerged in the Jin dynasty (265-420) in order to satisfy the needs of calligraphers who want to trace the brushwork of masters. Further, as Ledderose wrote, “as interest grew, the calligraphy of famous *tie* was also cut into stone, so that it could be distributed in the form of rubbing like that of the *bei*”<sup>9</sup>. Collected rubbings from stones are then compiled into albums, generally called *fatie* 法帖 (model calligraphies). As early as the tenth century, the Northern Song emperor Taizong 宋太宗 (r. 976-997) brought out the imperial collection of *tie* and ordered them cut into stones and woods; rubbings of them compiled together constitute the first calligraphy rubbing collection, known as *Chunhua ge tie* 淳化閣帖 (Calligraphy Model Book from the Chunhua Pavilion). Credited as the first *fatie*, *Chunhua ge tie* was said to preserve half of the authentic calligraphy works of the Jin dynasty, and thus served as a cornerstone for later rubbing collections in the Yuan (1271-1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties.<sup>10</sup>

As copying is essential in calligraphy, the authenticity and credibility of calligraphy rubbings thus is of vital importance for calligraphers who want to model their work on honoured prototypes. But, for early modern Chinese calligraphers, the rubbings and *fatie* they got were mostly copies of copies. As the Qing dynasty scholar Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858 – 1927) noted:

故今日所傳諸帖，無論何家，無論何帖，大抵宋明人重鉤屢翻之本，名雖義、獻，面目全非，精神尤不待論。<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>10</sup> For a critical introduction to *Chunhua ge tie*, see Cao, Baolin. *Zhongguo shufa shi: Song Liao Jin juan* 中國書法史：宋遼金卷 (History of Chinese Calligraphy: Volume on the Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties). Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999. 354 – 358.

<sup>11</sup> Kang, Youwei; Zhu Jia, comm. *Guang yi zhou shuang ji shu zheng* 廣藝舟雙楫疏證 (Two Oars of the Ship of Art: Annotations and Proofs). Taipei: Huacheng shuju, 1980. 14.

Thus, the various *tie* handed down to the present time, whatever their original writers and sources, mostly were re-copies of the Song and Ming dynasties. Although entitled as the works of Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, they were distorted beyond distortion; it is needless to discuss the essential spirit in them.

The drawbacks of *tie*, for Kang, were obvious – those learning from *tie* rarely formed their own styles, and Kang continued to describe that resorting to *bei* or stele inscriptions among Qing dynasty calligraphers appeared to be an irresistible trend. This aesthetic movement in calligraphy history, known as *beixue* 碑學, or “stele studies”, brought about new calligraphy styles. Robert Harrist made a succinct summary of the transition of the two traditions:

As calligraphers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries looked beyond the canon of masterpieces centered on informal brush-written works attributed, often dubiously, to Wang Xizhi (303-361), they discovered in the inscriptions of obscure or anonymous writers from the sixth century and earlier the foundations for a stylistic transformation of their art.<sup>12</sup>

These eighteenth and nineteenth century calligraphers were exactly those Kang Youwei referred to, those who revitalised the long-ignored pre-Tang stele inscriptions with intentions to form their own styles. The previously utilitarian stele inscriptions, such as epitaphs from the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), became new sources of inspiration for early modern Chinese calligraphers. And these utilitarian stone inscriptions, when employed as models for artistic calligraphy training, became works of art themselves. The following two points make explicit several issues germane to stele-calligraphy relations.

What were inscribed on stele? Tens of thousands of stelae were erected and

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<sup>12</sup> Harrist, Robert. *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008. 19.

recorded in post-Han dynasties, and they have maintained a comparatively stable text and context system. As Harrist observed, “although the stele is a type of monument, not a genre of writing, it has generally been reserved for certain types of texts.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, the long period before the Western Han dynasty (206 BC-9 AD) had not produced many stone inscriptions, and it was not until the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220) that the stone stelae with inscriptions, called since then *bei*, emerged in large numbers. As Dorothy Wong wrote, “In pre-imperial times, the *bei* was either a stone or a wooden pole and apparently did not carry inscriptions. The Han stele, however, evolved into a stone slab of standardized shape and size, and has become a main vehicle for ritual inscriptions.”<sup>14</sup> The standardised form of Han stele, along with the stylised texts, extended to stelae of later dynasties. In general, the ritual inscriptions of *bei* include texts of commendations, eulogies, accounts of imperial actions, histories of temples and government buildings and Confucian and Buddhist texts.<sup>15</sup> The contents of inscriptions are usually suggested by the titles of stelae, such as “Merit-recording Stele of Dunhuang Prefecture Pei Cen” (*Dunhuang taishou Pei Cen jigong bei* 敦煌太守裴岑記功碑), “Ritual Vessels Stele at the Temple of Confucius” (*Kongmiao liqi bei* 孔廟禮器碑, Fig. 1-1), “Three Scripts Stone Classics” (*San ti shijing* 三體石經, Fig. 1-2), and “Stele of Zhang Qian” (*Zhang Qian bei* 張遷碑).

Stele inscriptions were composed and engraved with the purpose of making the contents available to a wider public, which to some extent prescribed a limit to the scripts used. As Ledderose observed, “Epigraphic types, such as *chuan-shu*, *li-shu*, or *k'ai-shu* were usually chosen to be cut; only in exceptional cases does one find cursive types.”<sup>16</sup> These three scripts were chosen because of their legibility. Stele inscriptions before the Qin dynasty (221-206 BC) were written in seal script (*zhuan*), and the

<sup>13</sup> Harrist, Robert. “Reading Chinese Calligraphy”. In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Wong, Dorothy. *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Harrist, Robert. *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2008. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 11.

succeeding two periods of Han and “Wei Jin Nanbeichao” 魏晉南北朝 (Wei, Jin, and the Southern and Northern dynasties, 220-589) witnessed the birth and flourishing of clerical script (*li*) and regular script (*kai*). From the fifth century, to use Harrist’s term, regular script became the “default” type for stone inscription.<sup>17</sup> For a single stele, sometimes two or more scripts were employed. The *Three Scripts Stone Classics* (Fig. 1-2) from the Cao Wei period (220-265), which took its literary content from the Confucian classics *Shangshu* 尚書 (Book of Documents) and *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), was written in the three scripts of *zhuan*, *li*, and *kai*. For the history of calligraphy, stone inscriptions acted as an authentic carrier as well as a reliable witness of the development of these calligraphic scripts.

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<sup>17</sup> Harrist, Robert. *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008. 26. For a discussion of stele inscriptions and their types, see Zhao, Chao. *Zhongguo gudai shike gailun* 中國古代石刻概論 (General Discussion of Ancient Chinese Stone Carvings). Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997.





Fig. 1-1, *Ritual Vessels Stele at the Temple of Confucius* (detail). From *Han Liqi bei* 漢禮器碑. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 1991. 3.

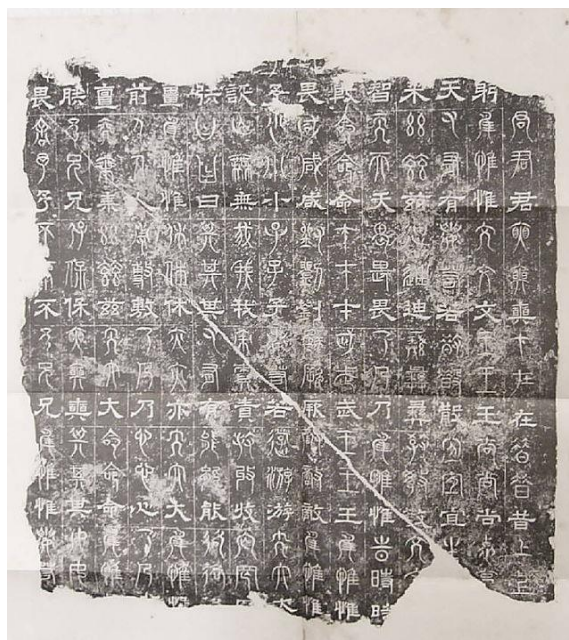


Fig. 1-2, *Three Scripts Stone Classics* (detail). From Ouyang, Zhongshi, Wen Fong, eds. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 3.

Who wrote stele? Those who composed the inscriptions should be differentiated from people who engraved the inscriptions on stones. The former ranges from literate elites, government officials to pilgrims; the latter, known in Chinese as *kegong* 刻工, or engravers, constitute a special group. “The calligraphers of the *bei* in most cases, including also the *Liqi bei* (*Ritual Vessels Stele at the Temple of Confucius*) [Fig. 1-1], remained anonymous,” wrote Ledderose, and “it was only in the second half of the second century that some stelae began to be signed.”<sup>18</sup> The process of carving usually involves two phases. As a first step, characters were brushed on stones with red pigment, usually called *shudan* 書丹, and then carvers transformed the brush-written characters

<sup>18</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 11. For studies of *kegong*, see Zeng, Yigong. *Shike kaogonglu* 石刻考工錄 (A Register of Stone Engravers). Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1987; Cheng, Zhangchan. *Shike kegong yanjiu* 石刻刻工研究 (A Study on Stone Engravers). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2008.

into chiseled incisions.

The professional skill of engravers determined, and was also reflected in, the quality of rubbings, known in Chinese as *taben* 拓本. Rubbings served as a substitute for inscribed stones, for it would be unreasonable for calligraphy students to have to travel to places that hold many actual inscribed stones. Rubbings are precise ink-on-paper copies of records and designs inscribed, mostly, on metal and stone objects.<sup>19</sup> While opinions vary on the origin of rubbing technique in China, there is agreement that stone inscription rubbings began no later than the Tang dynasty (618-907).<sup>20</sup> As an early technique for reproduction, rubbing was stimulated by its three main applications – reproducing guaranteed integral texts of stone classics, distributing religious (mainly Buddhist) creeds, and providing calligraphic models. These three applications or functions imply that rubbings were of importance for early officials, scholars, artists as well as common devotees.

Rubbing as a reproduction technique is intimate to the art of calligraphy. Being readily available, and reliable as a copy of its source, rubbings are always greatly valued by students of calligraphy. “For artists whose goal was to copy and assimilate ancient scripts and calligraphic styles,” wrote Harrist, “no tool was more essential than the ink rubbing, or *taben*.”<sup>21</sup> Conversely, it is worth pointing out that the demand for rubbings in calligraphic practice, of course, promotes the development of the rubbing technique. The seventh-century Tang Emperor Taizong (r. 626-649) ordered two pieces of Wang Xizhi’s famous work – *Lanting xu* 蘭亭序 (Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection) and *Shiqi tie* 十七帖 (A Group of Wang Xizhi’s Personal Letters) – to be cut into stones and have rubbings made from them. Another more representative example of calligraphic rubbing making was the execution of *Ji Wang Xizhi shengjiaoxu* 集王羲

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<sup>19</sup> Starr, Kenneth. *Black Tigers: A Grammar of Chinese Rubbings*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008. 3.

<sup>20</sup> The widely acknowledged earliest rubbing is a fragment of *Wenquan ming* 溫泉銘 (The Eulogy on the Hot Springs), with text composed by Emperor Taizong of Tang (r. 626-649). For a discussion of the history of rubbings, see Starr, Kenneth. *Black Tigers: A Grammar of Chinese Rubbings*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008; Wang, Zhuanghong. *Bei tie jianbie changshi* 碑帖鑒別常識 (Basic Understanding of Stele and Model Calligraphy). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Harrist, Robert. *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008. 20.

之聖教序 (Preface to the Holy Teachings Compiled from [Characters Written by] Wang Xizhi). The text was composed by Emperor Taizong in honour of the Buddhist monk and pilgrim Xuan Zang 玄奘 (602-664). Tang Emperor Gaozong (r. 649-683), successor of Emperor Taizong, ordered Huai Ren 懷仁 (669-751), a monk as well as a distant descendant of Wang Xizhi, to select identical characters from the various works of Wang Xizhi in the imperial collection, and then copy and compile them. By doing so, the entire work looked like an original work by Wang Xizhi, and as Ledderose points out, Emperor Gaozong realised his intention to make Wang Xizhi's semi-cursive script more widely known.<sup>22</sup>

Rubbing making in the Song dynasty (960-1279) advanced considerably, which brought about two changes to that practised in the Tang dynasty. First, in Song, rubbing technique started to be applied to copy bronze inscriptions (before Song, this technique was concerned predominantly with stone inscriptions). And second, as Ledderose observed, “a new type of rubbing gained prevalence: works of many different masters were cut into a series of stones, and rubbings from them were mounted together in album form,” which marks an extended use of the technique from the Tang dynasty, when rubbings only reproduced single pieces of calligraphy works.<sup>23</sup> The engraving of the above-mentioned *Chunhua ge tie* was a landmark of the second change. It was also during the Song dynasty, *jinshi xue* 金石學, or “metal-and-stone studies”, emerged as a subject whose primary research objects were the ancient bronzes and steles, and their rubbings.

Rubbings are often analogised to photographs, for their similar ability in shifting reality to other mediums. Bearing their own aesthetic characteristics, rubbings and handwritten calligraphic works make an intriguing couple. For the former, it's the “white shape of characters set off against the black background,” while for the latter, it's the black shape of characters set off against the white background.<sup>24</sup> The

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of *Ji Wang Xizhi shengjiaoxu*, see Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 14, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 36.

<sup>24</sup> Harist, Robert. *The Landscape of Words: Stone Inscriptions from Early and Medieval China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008. 20.

interconversion of the black and the white is just like the *yin* and *yang* of Chinese calligraphy, which in some sense maps out a circuitous route of calligraphy's moving forward: on one hand, outstanding handwritten pieces were carved onto stones and woods, from which rubbings were made; on the other hand, rubbings of utilitarian inscribed stones were placed on the table and became the primary source as well as models in the practicing of the art. Hence, ink-on-paper rubbings, along with tangible outdoor stone inscriptions, became works of art, within a unique calligraphic tradition that sets its feet on the past, while it casts its eyes into the future.

## 1.2 Sutra transcriptions

Religious texts, mainly Buddhist and Daoist scriptures in China, have a particular place in the history of calligraphy. Spanning from the fifth to early eleventh century, manuscripts found in Dunhuang, Gansu province, at the dawn of twentieth century include – but are not limited to – writings related to Buddhism, Taoism, and Nestorian Christianity, with the Buddhist scriptures occupying the majority. And in fact, as far as their calligraphy is concerned, Buddhist scriptural writings from the Jin dynasty to the Tang dynasty demonstrate complex evolutionary styles, which is of considerable significance for calligraphy historians in deciphering calligraphic scripts in early medieval China. In the transcription of vast Buddhist texts by various copyists, a unique calligraphic style started to take shape, and by the early Tang dynasty (seventh century), as Harrist said, “a form of small standard script loosely called ‘sutra writing style’ (*hsieh-ching t'i*) became all but universal for the transcription of sutras in China.”<sup>25</sup> Three aspects of Chinese sutra writing are of interest to us here: the wax and wane of sutra writing, types of Buddhist scribes, and the stylistic characteristics of the “sutra writing style” (寫經體).

Buddhism was introduced into China in the first century AD during the later Han

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<sup>25</sup> Harrist, Robert. “Reading Chinese Calligraphy”. In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 11.

dynasty. And in the following millennium, Buddhism developed to be the most successful foreign faith in China.<sup>26</sup> This success, to some degree, was brought about by two earnest Buddhist endeavours: translating Buddhist texts into Chinese and transcribing the Chinese scripture in great quantity. The former made it localised, and the latter, widely circulated, at a time when printing technology was not invented. One of the earliest extant handwritten Buddhist manuscripts, the *Sutras of Analogies* (譬喻經, Fig. 1-3), was done in 359 AD, which is roughly contemporary with Wang Xizhi's canonical *Lanting xu* (dated 353). If Wang's masterpiece exemplifies the classical literati characteristics of calligraphy – elegance, fluency, and full of emotion, the anonymous *Sutras of Analogies* represents another writing domain, which could be labelled as “folk calligraphy”.

Calling it a “folk calligraphy” is primarily based on the fact that transcribers of Buddhist scriptures were mostly at the middle or bottom of the social ladder. The scribes, also called *xiejing sheng* 寫經生 in Chinese, as Tsui Chung-hui summarised, “were either Buddhist monks, lay persons, professional calligraphers or scribes who earned their living by copying texts.”<sup>27</sup> Copying the same Buddhist scripture, these scribes however were inspired by different motives: monks intended to preach the Buddhist doctrines, less educated Buddhist devotees aimed to acquire Buddhist merits, and professional scribes depended on it as their livelihood. It might be supposed that their writing styles would have varied markedly, but in fact, they were remarkably alike.

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<sup>26</sup> The other foreign faiths include Mazdaism, Manichaeism, Nestorianism, Islam, and Judaism. For an introduction to Buddhism in China, see Jong, J. W. de, and Gregory Schopen. *Buddhist Studies*. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Tsui, Chung-hui. “A Study of Early Buddhist Scriptural Calligraphy: Based on Buddhist Manuscripts found in Dunhuang and Turfan (3-5 Century).” Ph.D. diss., University of Hong Kong, 2010. 57. For a discussion of Buddhist scribes and calligraphy from the third to the tenth centuries, see also Mao, Qiujin. “A Study of the Calligraphy of Buddhist and Daoist Scriptures of Dunhuang.” Ph.D. diss., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2005.

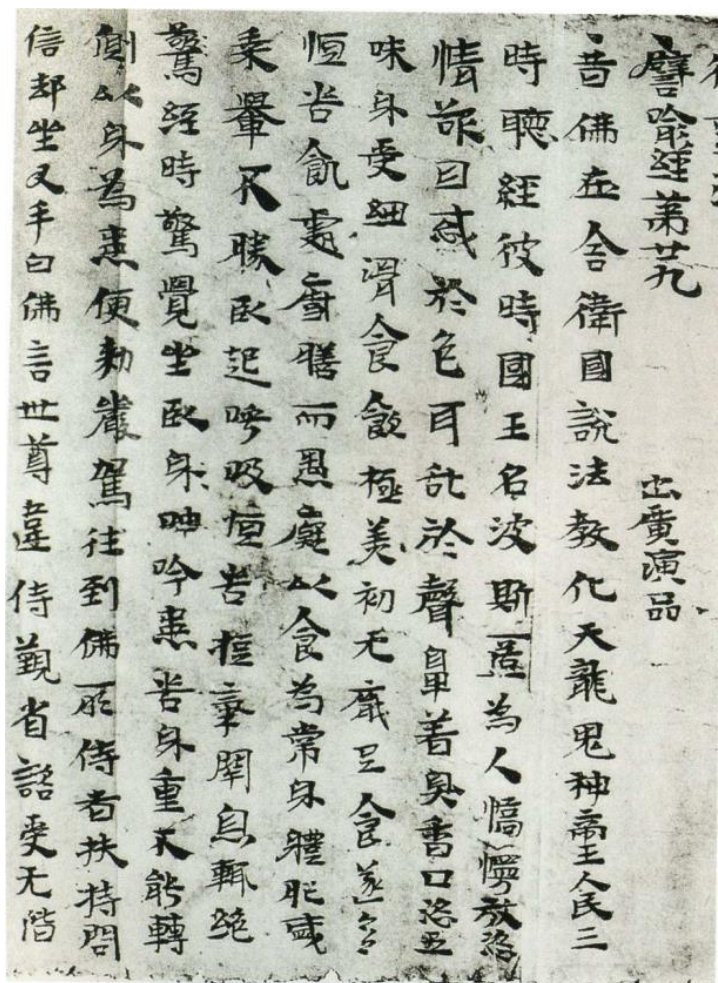


Fig. 1-3. Anonymous, *Sutras of Analogies* (detail), 359 AD, 24×239.3 cm, ink on paper. Ouyang, Zhongshi, Wen Fong, eds. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 170.

These copyists formed a distinctive writing style, the aforementioned “sutra writing style”, a representative example of which is the *Sutras of Analogies*. Early sutra transcribing happened to coincide with the period of development of various calligraphic scripts, a time when clerical script and regular script were at their formation stage, and running and cursive scripts also emerged and were employed in daily writings. The existence and popularity of these calligraphic scripts were verified by twentieth-century archaeological findings in northwestern China where a lot of official documents and personal letters were excavated. But the *xiejing* (sutras transcription) manuscripts, as Eileen Hsiang-Ling Hsu noted, “are largely rendered in a formal writing style, with each stroke executed separately and each character distinct and legible.”<sup>28</sup> The choice of this stylised formal script was primarily determined by the purposes of

<sup>28</sup> Hsu, Eileen Hsiang-Ling. “Six-Dynasties Xiejing Calligraphy.” *East Asian Library Journal* 9.2 (2000): 51.

sutras transcription: public circulation and religious efficacy. In the former, characters on the manuscript were written in such a way that common people had no problem in reading them, and in the latter, “cursory execution could be seen as compromising the level of devotion.”<sup>29</sup> And besides, the formal scripts – regular and clerical script – always leave an impression of authority and solemnity in private as well as in public, governmental domains.<sup>30</sup>

Early sutra writing, roughly from the period of Jin dynasty (265-420), demonstrates a blended style that incorporates the characteristics of clerical and regular scripts, which is exemplified in the *Sutras of Analogies* (Fig. 1-3). In this work, most of the characters are squat, and the downward right diagonal strokes are stressed and elongated. These are the exact defining characteristics of clerical script which had been practised since the Han dynasty. Unlike the clerical script, however, the tips of the horizontal strokes in *Sutras of Analogies* are pointed and written with a faster speed than that of clerical script, which is obviously a transmutation in the purpose of enhancing writing speed. Certain characters, such as *wen* 問 and *shi* 世, were written in the clerical structure, while others conveyed characteristics of the regular script, such as the hooked strokes, as demonstrated in the characters *hua* 化 and *chang* 常. Calligraphy historians believe that these hooks, including horizontal hook, diagonal hook, as well as vertical hook, define the characteristics of the regular script. In short, sutra transcription at its initial phase was a fusion of clerical and regular scripts.<sup>31</sup>

The following two centuries, or the period between the Southern dynasties (420-589) and Sui dynasty (581-618), witnessed the gradual maturity of regular script in sutra transcribing. This change was brought about by the wider use of the regular script during this period, which can be demonstrated by writings on epitaphs and stone

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. For a discussion of the formal writing style in transcribing Buddhist sutras, see also Mao, Qiu-jin. “A Study of the Calligraphy of Buddhist and Daoist Scriptures of Dunhuang.” Ph.D. diss., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Tsui, Chung-hui. “A Study of Early Buddhist Scriptural Calligraphy: Based on Buddhist Manuscripts found in Dunhuang and Turfan (3-5 Century).” Ph.D. diss., University of Hong Kong, 2010. 89.

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed discussion of the first stage of sutras writing, see Hsu, Eileen Hsiang-Ling. “Six-Dynasties Xiejing Calligraphy.” *East Asian Library Journal* 9.2 (2000); and Tsui, Chung-hui. “A Study of Early Buddhist Scriptural Calligraphy: Based on Buddhist Manuscripts found in Dunhuang and Turfan (3-5 Century).” Ph.D. diss., University of Hong Kong, 2010.



inscriptions of that time.<sup>32</sup> It should be pointed out that Buddhist sutras started to be engraved on stones, cliffs, and caves during this period, which, as Katherine R. Tsiang indicated, is a unique Chinese expression of Buddhist observance and an innovative achievement in the history of Buddhist Art.<sup>33</sup> After the short lived Sui dynasty, sutra writing stepped into its golden era.

The Tang dynasty (618-907) produced the most abundant Buddhist manuscripts, and its calligraphy reached a higher level than that achieved in the previous four centuries. Such a boom in Buddhist transcription is related, on one hand, to a great deal of state support, and on the other hand, to common people's active engagement with Buddhism. The Tang dynasty was also a golden age for the art of calligraphy: government set up institutions for studying calligraphy, and calligraphy became an important criterion in the government's selecting of officials. The prosperity of Buddhism, combined with the advocacy of calligraphy, helps to explain the abundance of Tang Buddhist manuscripts discovered in Dunhuang.<sup>34</sup>

The aesthetic properties of sutra calligraphy, to some degree, are a reflection of the overall Tang calligraphy temperament. This spirit, in many calligraphy treatises, is summarised in a single Chinese character, *fa* 法, meaning "law" and "method". The *fa* method, as noticed by Peter Sturman, "suggest[s] regimen and discipline imposed from above by a higher authority – moral, political or otherwise."<sup>35</sup> Being the prominent script, *kai*, or regular script, best represents the methods of Tang, made up of carefully controlled strokes within a strict matrix. A group of calligraphy masters, who served in court and were masters of the regular script, emerged in the early Tang, such as Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638), Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), and Chu Suiliang 褚遂

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<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of the regular script in the fifth century, see Hsu, Eileen Hsiang-Ling. "Six-Dynasties Xiejing Calligraphy." *East Asian Library Journal* 9.2 (2000).

<sup>33</sup> Tsiang, Katherine R. "Monumentalization of Buddhist Texts in the Northern Qi Dynasty: The Engraving of Sūtras in Stone at the Xiangtangshan Caves and Other Sites in the Sixth Century." *Artibus Asiae* 56.3-4 (1996): 258.

<sup>34</sup> For a discussion of Buddhist transcription calligraphy in the Tang dynasty, see Zhu, Guantian. *Zhongguo shufa shi: Sui Tang Wudai juan* 中國書法史：隋唐五代卷 (History of Chinese Calligraphy: Volume on Sui, Tang and Five Dynasties). Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999. 209-221; Wang, Yuanjun. "Tangdai xiejing sheng ji qi shufa" 唐代寫經生及其書法 (Tang Dynasty Buddhist Scribes and Their Calligraphy). *Zhongguo shuhua* 8 (2005): 5-10.

<sup>35</sup> Sturman, Peter. *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. 21.



良 (597-658).<sup>36</sup> Early Tang calligraphy history cannot afford to ignore the influence of these masters, and contemporary Buddhist scribes, many believe, regarded these masters as role models and imitated their styles. The copy of the *Samantapāsādikā*, or *Shan jian lü* 善見律 (Fig. 1-4), transcribed by early Tang professional scribe Guo Quan 國詮, well demonstrates the *fa* method in Buddhist scriptures of this period. Containing more than 4400 characters and written in an elegant regular script, this piece of handwritten manuscript was neatly arranged in some 260 columns that are designated by visible black lines. Every character occupies an equivalent space and each column contains seventeen characters. With a close look of the individual characters and strokes, today's calligraphy students would have no obstacles in imagining and experiencing the moderate writing tempo and the scribe's pious attitude. Despite the fact that not all sutras were written in a way like that of *Shan jian lü*, and some of them could be very coarse, Guo Quan's transcribing represented a calligraphic style prevalent in Tang dynasty sutra calligraphy.

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<sup>36</sup> For a study of the calligraphy of the early Tang dynasty, see Goldberg, Stephen. "Court Calligraphy of the Early T'ang Dynasty." *Artibus Asiae* 49.3-4 (1988): 189-237.

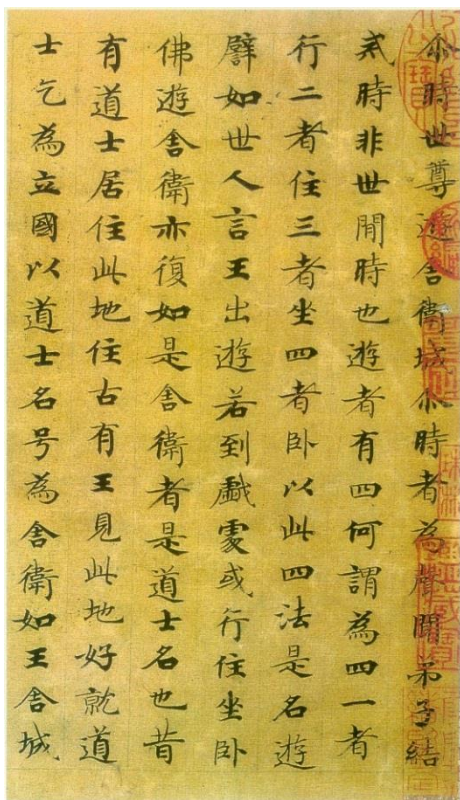


Fig. 1-4, Guo Quan, *Shan jian lü* (detail), 22.6×468.8 cm, ink on paper. Palace Museum, Beijing.

Sutra transcribing declined after the Five Dynasties (907-960), mainly because of the spread and application of woodblock printing technology. Handwritten copying of Buddhist manuscripts after Tang, however, did not finish, and most were copied by professional scribes; some were even well-known calligraphers of their time.<sup>37</sup> A frequently-mentioned Buddhist transcriber after the Five Dynasties, Zhang Jizhi 張即之 (1186-1266), was a scholar-official of the Southern Song. As a famous calligrapher, Zhang transcribed dozens of Buddhist scriptures, including the widespread Buddhist canon *Diamond Sutra* (*Jin gang jing* 金剛經, Fig. 1-5). Zhang's transcription, incorporating running script elements, embodies a refreshing regular script in Song dynasty. The characters in this work, as Amy McNair described, "combine thick and thin strokes with great drama, and thickly drawn dark characters alternate with finely drawn light ones, creating a nearly three-dimensional effect."<sup>38</sup> With an impressive

<sup>37</sup> Harrist, Robert. "Reading Chinese Calligraphy". In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 11.

<sup>38</sup> McNair, Amy. "Chang Chi-chih (1186-1266): Diamond Sutra (Chin-kang Ching)". In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 118.

personal imprint, Zhang’s work however followed the decorum of sutra writing through his well-arranged composition as well as the pious attitude that is demonstrated by the extreme regularity and discipline of the traces of his brush.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 1-5, Zhang Jizhi, *Diamond Sutra* (detail), ink on ruled paper.

Princeton University Art Museum.

A review of the calligraphy of Buddhist sutra copies reveals that the “sutra writing style” is an “evolutionary” term, and until the Tang dynasty, its main characteristics as a subgenre of regular script became stabilised. Besides, sutra calligraphies are prone to the influence of contemporary mainstream calligraphic styles. The main aesthetic properties of sutra calligraphy – *fa* and dignity – manifested in strokes as well as in compositions, to some degree, are also a reflection of the respectful and rigorous attitude of different types of Buddhist scribes.

<sup>39</sup> For an analysis of Zhang Jizhi’s style, see Fu, Shen. *Traces of the Brush: Studies in Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, 1977. 138.

Sutra transcriptions, however, had long been dismissed as laymen's writings and were not valued as orthodox calligraphic works. In the Tang dynasty, the period that produced the largest number of Buddhist scripture copies, it was the famous calligraphers' handwritings rather than the sutra transcriptions that were valued as artworks. In the treatises of the prominent Tang calligraphy critic Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (act. 713-741), sutra transcribers were given no place in the pantheon of calligraphers.

However, the inferior status of sutra transcriptions took a turn for the better in the Song dynasty. *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 (Catalogue of Calligraphy in the Xuanhe Era), a twelfth-century calligraphy catalogue of Emperor Huizong's imperial collection, recorded several sutra transcribers and recognised the artistic characteristics of their sutra transcriptions. For example, in this catalogue the sutra transcription of the Tang monk Tanlin's 釋曇林 was characterised as follows:

其一波三折筆之勢，亦自不苟，豈其意與筆正特見嚴謹。<sup>40</sup>

The force-form (*shi*) manifested in the twists and turns of his calligraphy is also meticulously executed. Isn't it that his ideas and brushwork are distinctive and rigorous?

In the twentieth century, works of sutra transcription started to exert considerable influence in calligraphy practice with new discoveries, as Eileen Hsu wrote,

It was not until after the discovery of thousands of manuscripts in the Thousand Buddha Hall at Dunhuang at the turn of the twentieth century that the ancient sutra transcriptions began to be valued as important historical documents and appreciated as artistic works.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gui, Dizi, comm. and trans. *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 (Catalogue of Calligraphy in the Xuanhe Era). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 103.

<sup>41</sup> Hsu, Eileen Hsiang-Ling. "Six-Dynasties Xiejing Calligraphy." *East Asian Library Journal* 9.2 (2000): 49.

### 1.3 Letters

The first section of this chapter makes explicit the two models of Chinese calligraphy – *bei* and *tie*: *bei* denotes stone stelae with engraved inscriptions, and *tie* usually refers to handwritten pieces on paper and silk. Personal letters, the subject of this section, belong to the genre of *tie*, and are believed to be a central component of the *tie* tradition. Letters, or correspondence, are known in Chinese as *chidu* 尺牘. Before the invention of paper in the first century AD, characters were written on *du* 牘 (wood tablets) that were normally in the length of one *chi* 尺 (around one third of a metre). Hence, early Chinese letters are entitled *chidu*, “letter on foot-long wood or bamboo tablets”.

Early Chinese letters, like letters in other cultures, are merely a literary genre, whose main function is to deliver information and communicate views. The Han dynasty served as a turning point when letter writing was elevated to a kind of epistolary art. A famous story of Liu Mu 劉睦 (fl. 1<sup>st</sup> century), a cousin of Emperor Ming of the Han (r. 57-75), helps us to get a glimpse of the new treatment of letter writing in the Han dynasty:

又善史書，當世以為楷則。及寢病，帝驛馬，令作草書尺牘十首。<sup>42</sup>

[Liu Mu] was good at writing the clerical script and his contemporaries took him as a standard and followed his model. When he was lying on his deathbed the emperor sent an express courier by horse and asked Liu Mu to write ten letters in draft cursive script.<sup>43</sup>

A person’s manuscripts or original handwritings, which were seen as reminiscent

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<sup>42</sup> Fan, Ye, comp.; Li Xian, comm. *Hou Han shu* 後漢書 (History of the Later Han). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965. 557.

<sup>43</sup> Translation cited from Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 30.

of his or her personality, compared to sutra transcribing, represent an individualised style and start to be consciously collected in the Han dynasty. As Ledderose wrote, “this shows again how handwriting became valued as an immediate expression of the individuality and even as the best possible substitute for the person of the writer himself.”<sup>44</sup> The account of Chen Zun 陳遵 (fl. 1<sup>st</sup> century) pushes the date of letter collecting back to the Xin period (9-24):

性善書，與人尺牘，主皆藏去以為榮。<sup>45</sup>

[Chen Zun] was born with dexterity in letter writing; people who received his letters carefully stored them with honour.<sup>46</sup>

Letter writing as an art reached its peak in the Six Dynasties (222-589), a period that saw the increasing awareness of calligraphic forms. During this period, *chidu* became the favourable means of communication besides *qingtán* 清談, or “pure conversation”.<sup>47</sup> Compared to the preceding Han letters, letters in this period were more treasured for their beautiful handwriting; literati and officials appeared to be respected and commemorated for their achievements in calligraphy. Pan Yue 潘岳 (247-300), a prominent Western Jin writer, appraised his father-in-law Yang Zhao 楊肇 (fl. 250) in an eulogy as follows:

草隸兼善，尺牘必珍……翰動若飛，紙落如雲。<sup>48</sup>

[Yang Zhao] was skilled at both cursive and official script; there was no doubt that his letters were treasured by recipients……When writing, his brush moved

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ban, Gu, comp.; Yan Shigu, comm. *Han shu* 漢書 (The History of Han). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962. 3711.

<sup>46</sup> Translation cited from Kadar, Daniel Z. *Historical Chinese Letter Writing*. London: Continuum, 2010. 175.

<sup>47</sup> As a form of debate, “pure conversation” (*qingtán*) refers to an indigenous Chinese intellectual practice from the third century onward of discussing metaphysical issues. For a discussion of *qingtán*, see Tang, Yiming. “The Voice of Wei-Jin Scholars: A Study of ‘Qingtán’”. Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1991.

<sup>48</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Chinese Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 46.

swiftly and characters fell on paper as light as clouds.

As a prefectural governor, Yang Zhao was skilled at letter writing and renowned for his scripts, and after his death, his calligraphy as well as his official achievements became a constituent of his obituary. Historical records before Western Jin (265-317) had not described any person as “good at epistles”, or *shan chidu* 善尺牘 in Chinese, while calligraphy commentaries and historical texts after Jin frequently referred officials as such. “Good at epistles” should not be understood solely as “good at writing letters”; this term was meant to highlight a person’s full calligraphic talents. Descriptions of a person’s calligraphic skills were always closely preceded by the comment of “good at epistles”. The record of Cai Jingli 蔡景歷 (519-578) in the *Nan shi* 南史 (History of the Southern Dynasties) serves as a good example.<sup>49</sup>

From the fourth to the sixth century, especially in southern China, those “good at epistles” were conscious of the role letters could play in demonstrating their calligraphy. As Bai Qianshen wrote, “Although there were no galleries and museums in the modern sense for collecting and displaying works of art, letters became a vehicle to show off one’s calligraphy and were showcases for a calligrapher’s achievement.”<sup>50</sup> In his far-reaching *Shupu* 書譜 (Treatise on Calligraphy), Sun Guoting 孫過庭 (646-691) recorded a famous calligraphy story that took place among Eastern Jin (317-420) aristocrats:

謝安素善尺牘，而輕子敬之書。子敬嘗作佳書與之，謂必存錄，安輒題後答之，甚以為恨。<sup>51</sup>

Xie An (320-385) excelled in writing epistles and had a low opinion of Wang

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<sup>49</sup> Li, Yanshou. *Nan shi* 南史 (History of the Southern Dynasties). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000. 1109.

<sup>50</sup> Bai, Qianshen. “Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public”. In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 381-382.

<sup>51</sup> Sun, Guoting. *Shupu* 書譜 (Treatise on Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Chutang shulun* 初唐書論 (Early Tang Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 65.

Xianzhi's calligraphy. Wang Xianzhi (344-386) once wrote (what he thought was) a beautiful letter and sent it to him, expecting him to keep it. But Xie An immediately wrote a reply on the back and send it back. Wang Xianzhi very much resented this.<sup>52</sup>

In this anecdote, letter writing was not only an intended activity to show off one's calligraphy, but also it provided a space for calligraphic competitiveness.<sup>53</sup> Being a calligrapher, Xie An was a friend of Wang Xizhi (father of Wang Xianzhi) and himself good at semi-cursive script. Xie always had a high opinion of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy, and returning Wang Xianzhi's letter was a candid display of his taste and connoisseurship in calligraphy.

For collectors in the following centuries (from the fifth to seventh century), both Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi's letters were collected and appreciated. The handwritten pieces of the Two Wang, most being letters, gradually became the cornerstone of what Ledderose called the "classical tradition" through the patronage and collection of several imperial courts. The four succeeding dynasties after the Eastern Jin – Liu Song (420-479), Southern Qi (479-502), Liang (502-557) and Chen (557-589) – all produced aristocratic collectors who showed great interest in assembling the Two Wang's pieces.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, it was not until the era of Emperor Taizong of Tang that the Wang tradition was finally established. As Ledderose wrote, "he emulated Wang Xizhi in his own handwriting, he wrote influential critical comments on Wang Xizhi's art, he assembled an enormous collection of his works, and he fostered the study

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<sup>52</sup> Translation cited from Chang, Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 2.

<sup>53</sup> For further discussion, see Bai, Qianshen. "Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public". In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 382.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of pre-Tang calligraphy collection, see Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 39-42; and Liu, Tao. *Zhongguo shufa shi: Wei Jin Nanbei chao juan* 中國書法史：魏晉南北朝卷 (History of Chinese Calligraphy: Volume on Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties). Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002. 521-540. The pre-Tang imperial collection of the two Wang's writings was large: Song Mingdi 宋明帝 (465-472) collected 247 scrolls of the two Wang's works in 26 wrappers; in the Tianjian era of Liang 梁天監 (502-519), the imperial court amassed 767 scrolls in 78 wrappers. See, Zhang, Huaiguan. "Er Wang shulu" 二王書錄 (A Record of the Two Wang's Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhang Huaiguan shulu* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan's Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2011. 1-10.



of Wang's style among the educated elite."<sup>55</sup> Casual notes, informal letters of the two Wangs, regardless of their authenticity, were canonised as models for later calligraphers to imitate and initiated the long tradition of *tie*.

There are about 270 of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy works extant, including those attributed to him, scattered in the museums of China and other regions; of the extant oeuvre of Wang Xizhi, the genre of letters or *chidu* calligraphy constitutes a vital part.<sup>56</sup> Most of Wang Xizhi's letters were written to friends, family members and officials, dealing with daily trivialities, such as inquiring and reporting on health, offering gifts, expressing happiness and grief, or exchanging ideas with officials.<sup>57</sup> Compared to the calligraphy of these letters, the literary content of the letters is more reliable. As Antje Richter wrote, "The fact that none of the transmitted pieces of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy are originals does not as such have any consequence for the authenticity of their texts."<sup>58</sup> Wang Xizhi's epistolary writings are usually no more than a hundred characters. A long letter like *You mu tie* 遊目帖 (Letter expecting a journey, Fig. 1-6), contains 102 characters that are arranged in eleven columns, in which Wang Xizhi expressed his yearnings for travelling to southwest China where his friend was a prefect. A short letter like *Feng ju tie* 奉桔帖 (Presenting Oranges), containing only twelve characters in two lines, is a letter attached to a gift of three hundred oranges.

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<sup>55</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 25.

<sup>56</sup> Of the extant handwritten pieces attributed to Wang Xizhi, none are in the original. Instead, his works exist mainly in the form of *linmo* 臨摹 (freehand and tracing copies), *ketie* 刻帖 (printed copybook), and *xiangta* 響搨 (silhouette copies by illumination). *Sang luan tie* 喪亂帖 (Note of Distress and Indignation) and *Kong shi zhong tie* 孔侍中帖 (Letter to Kong) are two Tang tracing copies and are now preserved in Japan. Taiwan treasures several of Wang Xizhi's tracing copies including but not limited to *Ping'an san tie* 平安三帖 (Three Passages of Calligraphy), *Yuan huan tie* 遠宦帖 (Letter to a Distant Imperial Official), *Kuai xue shi qing tie* 快雪時晴帖 (Sudden Clearing after a Lively Snowfall), and *Changfeng tie* 長風帖. In mainland China, *Yimu tie* 姨母帖 (Deploring the Death of My Aunt), *Chuyue tie* 初月帖 (Letter Written in the First Lunar Month), and *Han qie tie* 寒切帖 (Bitter Cold) are collected in provincial museums. Another important work, *Xing rang tie* 行穰帖 (Ritual to Pray for Good Harvest), is probably Wang's most discussed handwritten piece in Western academia and is now in the collection of the Princeton University Art Museum. For discussions of Wang Xizhi's works, see Wang, Yuchi. "Striving for Perfection amid Social Upheavals: Calligraphy during the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties." In Ouyang, Zhongshi, and Wen Fong, eds. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 133-187; Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 12-24; Harist, Robert. "Copies, All the Way Down: Notes on the Early Transmission of Calligraphy by Wang Xizhi". *East Asian Library Journal* 10.1 (2001): 176-96.

<sup>57</sup> Bai, Qianshen. "Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public". In Harist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 385.

<sup>58</sup> Richter, Antje. "Beyond Calligraphy: Reading Wang Xizhi's Letters." *T'oung Pao* 96.4-5 (2010): 372.

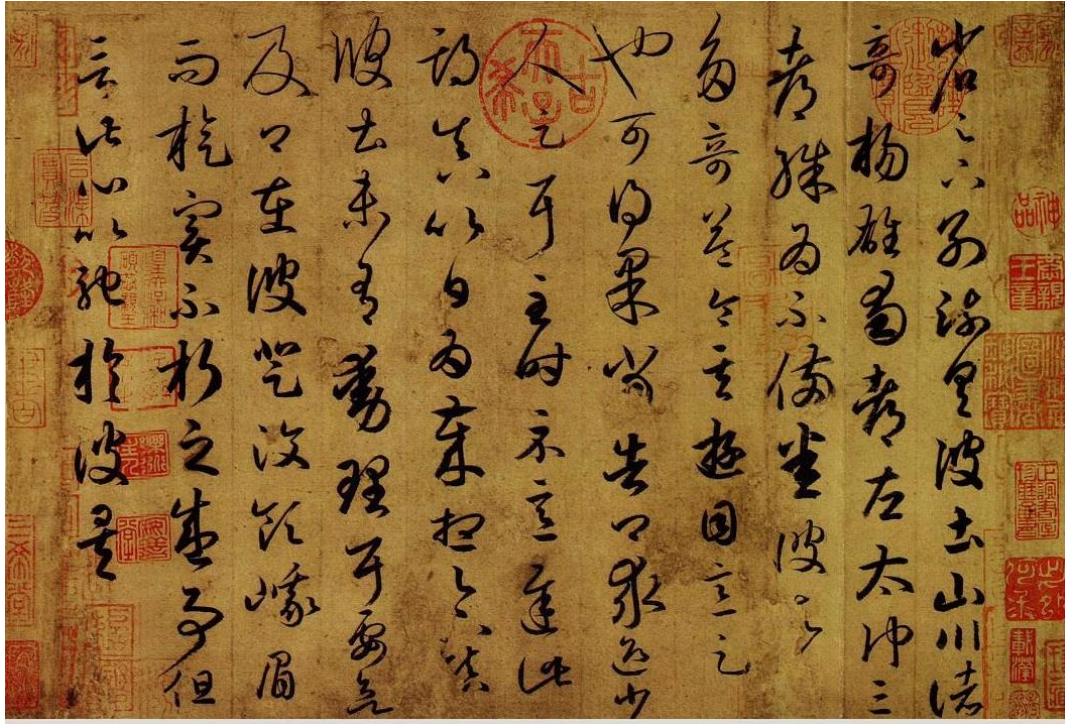


Fig. 1-6, Wang Xizhi, *You mu tie*, ink on paper, cursive script.

But it is their calligraphic fascination, rather than their literal texts, that makes Wang Xizhi's letters works of art. As Bai Qianshen puts it in an article about the publicity of private letters, "I assume that in most cases viewers concentrated on the calligraphy and did not enter deeply into the messages of these letters, maintaining a psychological distance from their literal contents."<sup>59</sup> However, what exactly attracts the attention of the viewers of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy? What is the formal content of a piece of calligraphy? What is the calligraphic aesthetic object? And how do we describe the viewer's aesthetic experience of calligraphy? The following chapters endeavour to answer these questions.

## Conclusion

The term "Chinese Art", according to Clunas, implies that there are "unifying principles"

<sup>59</sup> Bai, Qianshen. "Chinese Letters: Private Words Made Public". In Harist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 385.

behind a wide variety of things made in China, things of “very different materials, and very different makers, audiences, and contexts of use.”<sup>60</sup> It is doubtful whether the unifying principles exist. Therefore, a way to understand a specific form of Chinese art – *shufa* or Chinese calligraphy, for example – is to return to the concrete works, their materials, makers, and contexts. The three calligraphic genres discussed in this chapter certainly do not embrace all kinds of Chinese calligraphy. But through sketching the historical trajectories and the artistic features of these three common types of calligraphy, a Chinese notion of (calligraphic) “artwork” in a pre-modern Chinese context is established. This chapter also points to the fact that some types of artefacts in China go through a process of becoming “artworks”. For example, these three calligraphic genres – stone inscription, sutra transcriptions, and letters – had all undergone a certain transformation from utilitarian writings to artistic calligraphy works. This chapter, in addition, achieves the purpose of presenting a short history of Chinese calligraphy, useful for readers unfamiliar with the art.

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<sup>60</sup> Clunas, Craig. *Art in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 10.

## Chapter 2

### Calligraphic *Xing* and *Shi* are Mutually Reflected

(*xingshi xiangyin* 形勢相映)

Conventional calligraphy criticism throughout history displays a tendency towards what in Western art discourse is known as “formalism”, an aesthetic doctrine that broadly claims formal properties to be the proper subject of an artwork. Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858-1927), a noted calligrapher, scholar, and political reformer, wrote that “calligraphy is a study that rests on [its] configuration” (蓋書，形學也).<sup>1</sup> Kang’s dictum suggests two interpretations: first, the practice of calligraphy should focus on its forms; second, appreciating and evaluating calligraphy should concentrate on its forms. As the following chapters will explicate calligraphic creation and appreciation, it is necessary to properly examine calligraphic *xing* 形 (form).

In classical calligraphy criticism, discourses on *xing* inevitably involve another important aesthetic term, *shi* 勢 (force; dynamic configuration; potential). For example, Kang Youwei, immediately after making the above statement, wrote that “once there is a configuration, there is a potential [*shi*] stemming from that configuration” (有形則有勢).<sup>2</sup> On one hand, it is generally believed that *shi*, as an aesthetic effect, is attached to the visible *xing*. On the other hand, if the form of a calligraphic work does not achieve *shi*, such a form is not a “form of motion” or a “living form”<sup>3</sup>, as Susanne Langer termed it – something successful calligraphic works present. Given that *xing* and *shi* are mutually dependent, a discussion of the former thus

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<sup>1</sup> English translation cited from Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 76.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> I borrow these two terms from Susanne Langer. “Living form” in the arts, as Langer delineated, “is in the first place dynamic form, that is, a form whose permanence is really a pattern of changes. Secondly, it is organically constructed; its elements are not independent parts, but interrelated, interdependent centers of activity – that is, organs. Thirdly, the whole system is held together by rhythmic processes.” See, Langer, Susanne K. *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957. 52.

necessitates that of the latter.

## 2.1 Form and its Chinese counterparts

“Form” has long been a significant concept in the tradition of Western scholarship, prevalent in writings in literary theory, art history, and aesthetics. The term’s early history dates back to the Romans, and as the Polish philosopher Władysław Tatarkiewicz noticed, “few terms are as international: the Latin *forma* has been accepted in many languages, in Italian, Spanish, Polish, and Russian without change, in others with slight alteration (in French *forme*, in English ‘form,’ and in German *Form*).”<sup>4</sup>

Tatarkiewicz, of course, can’t justify an international concept of “form” with a reference to variations of the term in some European countries; it is Occidental, at best. Tatarkiewicz explicated five meanings of the term: (1) form equates to the arrangement of parts; (2) form is what the senses directly feel; (3) form is the shape of an object; (4) a substantial form connotes the essence of things; (5) the Kantian *a priori* form is a contribution of the mind in the perception of objects.<sup>5</sup> The meanings of the term “form” in this chapter should not be confused with these, arising as it does in a unique Chinese artistic discourse.

The term “form” is often translated in Chinese as *xing* 形, or *xingshi* 形式; the former is an indigenous classical Chinese term, the latter an imported modern one. *Xing* was a frequently mentioned concept in pre-Qin (before 221 BC) writings, bearing three main literal meanings: (1) *xing* denotes the bodily shape of humans and the shape of other objects; (2) *xing* is used to describe the natural environment, and more commonly, natural features of a terrain; (3) *xing* in its abstract sense refers to an actual situation at a certain time. In *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法, universally known as *The Art of War*, an influential Chinese military treatise written in the fifth century BC, two of its thirteen chapter titles contain the character *xing*, meaning respectively “tactical disposition” and

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<sup>4</sup> Tatarkiewicz, Władysław. “Form in the History of Aesthetics.” In Wiener, Philip P., ed. *Dictionary of the History of Ideas: Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*. Vol. 2. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1973. 216.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 216-225.

“situational positioning”. In *Zhuangzi* 莊子, an early Chinese philosophical text from the late Warring States period (476-221 BC), *xing* was mentioned 181 times, most carrying the first meaning.

*Xing* was employed as an irreplaceable term in early Chinese aesthetic discourses, in the area of music. Xunzi 荀子 (312-239 BC), a great exponent of Confucianism, used the term in the opening paragraph in the *Discourse on Music* (*Yue lun* 樂論):

故人不能無樂，樂則必發於聲音，形於動靜……故人不能不樂，樂則不能無形，形而不為道，則不能無亂。<sup>6</sup>

So, people cannot be without music; if they feel joy, they must express it in sound and give it shape [*xing*] in movement... So, people cannot be without joy, and their joy cannot be without shape [*xing*], but if it takes shape [*xing*] and does not accord with the Way, then there will inevitably be chaos.<sup>7</sup>

*Xing*, translated here with the verb “to shape”, was mentioned three times in this short passage, and all three conveyed a consistent meaning: the joy felt in music given a shape. In *Yue ji* 樂記 (Record of Music), the earliest fully-developed treatise on music that dated no later than the first century AD, *xing* was mentioned nine times, occupying a more important role than in *Yue lun*. Though borrowing some verbatim passages from *Yue lun*, *Yue ji* offered a new meaning of *xing* in its opening passages:

凡音之起，由人心生也。人心之動，物使之然也。感於物而動，故形於聲……凡音者，生人心者也。情動於中，故形於聲。<sup>8</sup>

In all cases, the arising of music (*yin*) is born in the hearts of men. The

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<sup>6</sup> Liang, Qixiong. *Xunzi jianshi* 荀子簡釋 (Xunzi: A Concise Elucidation). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983. 277.

<sup>7</sup> Translation cited from Ivanhoe, Philip J., and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds. *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*. New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2001. 271.

<sup>8</sup> Ji, Lian kang. *Yue ji yi zhu* 樂記譯注 (Yue Ji: Annotation and Translation). Beijing: Yinyue chubanshe, 1958. 1.

movement of men's hearts is made so by [external] things. [Their hearts] are touched off by things and move, thus they take shape (*xing*) in [human] sound (*sheng*)...All music (*yin*) arises in the hearts of men. Emotion is stirred within and thus takes shape (*xing*) in sound.<sup>9</sup>

*Xing* in *Yue ji* started to take on an ontological meaning in Chinese music theory, i.e. sound (*sheng* 聲) acts as a kind of form (*xing*) *in* or *of* musical expression. The above passage established an early prototype of “*xin* 心 (heart-mind) – *wu* 物 (external things) interaction” that is prevalent in Chinese art criticism, and according to Scott Cook, “it is taken for granted that this reaction will be given external expression, in the form of *sheng* – a product of the interplay between the internal and the external.”<sup>10</sup> The fourth chapter on Chinese understanding of creative process will return to this passage.

*Yue ji*'s time of composition – Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD) – was the period of *xing*'s transformation from a general term to an aesthetic term.<sup>11</sup> The Han Dynasty and its following three centuries witnessed the development of self-consciousness in Chinese arts, and the concept of *xing* became a widely used aesthetic term in the critical texts of various arts. In the seminal writings of the second-century calligraphy theorist Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192), *xing* was singled out and became one of the earliest aesthetic terms in calligraphy criticism:

為書之體，須入其形，若坐若行，若飛若動，若往若來，若臥若起，若愁若喜，若蟲食木葉，落利劍長戈，若強弓硬矢，若水火，若雲霧，若日月，縱橫有可象者，方得謂之書矣。<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cook, Scott. “‘Yue Ji’, 樂記 – Record of Music: Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary.” *Asian Music* 26.2 (1995): 24, 29.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of the term “*xing*” in Han dynasty aesthetics see Liu, Chengji. “Handai meixue zhong de shenti wenti 漢代美學中的身體問題” (The Body in the Aesthetics of the Han Dynasty). Ph.D. diss., Wuhan University, 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Cai Yong, *Bilun* 筆論 (On Writing). In Huang Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Chinese Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 6.

The principle of practising calligraphy lies in fathoming its *xing* (calligraphic forms). Its forms resemble [or call to mind the images of] sitting and walking, flying and moving, coming and going, crouching and rising, sadness and happiness, insects eating leaves, sharp sword and long dagger, strong bow and hard arrow, water and fire, cloud and mist, sun and moon. If the vertical and horizontal images [of the overall configuration of the calligraphic work] stimulate the viewer, then such a work can be labelled as calligraphy.

Calligraphy is the brush writing of Chinese characters, and certain Chinese characters, according to philologist Xu Shen 許慎 (58–147), were created through an imitation of the forms of objects in the natural world. This may help explain why early calligraphy theorists like Cai Yong resorted to images of nature to describe calligraphy. Another scholar-calligrapher Suo Jing 索靖 (239–303) characterised ancient pictographic writing, such as the bird and the seal script, as “simulations of objects and forms [of nature]” (類物象形).<sup>13</sup> But, calligraphy is by nature an “abstract”, or non-representational art, and *xing* in calligraphy, unlike *xing* in Chinese painting, is never a representation of natural objects. As Gao Jianping put it,

When calligraphy had its independent development, a process which took place several thousand years after the Chinese began to write, the practice of imitating natural forms was no longer prevalent and calligraphers felt that it was impossible to directly take the forms of the natural world into their art. Calligraphy became a particular symbol system with its own rules and conventions, totally irrelevant to image representation.<sup>14</sup>

When Cai Yong laid down the principle that calligraphy *xing* should resemble natural

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<sup>13</sup> Translation cited from Fong, Wen. “Chinese Calligraphy: Theory and History”. In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 33.

<sup>14</sup> Gao, Jianping. *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting*. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012. 184.



images, he frequently employed the Chinese character *ruo* 若 (meaning “resemble or bear a likeness to”), a word that reveals implicitly how calligraphers get inspiration from natural objects and then create calligraphic forms that resemble the “spirit” of natural objects. According to traditional calligraphic theory, such spirit is always embodied in the *shi* 勢 (momentum or tendency) of nature, and the process of transforming the natural *shi* to calligraphic form is captured by the verb *qushi* 取勢 meaning “pick out *shi*”.

*Xing* has become a recurring calligraphy aesthetic term since its debut in Cai Yong’s second-century treatise, and in the following seventeen centuries it has appeared frequently in texts on calligraphy. Besides the fact that it was used together with *shi* on numerous occasions, the calligraphic *xing* is often accompanied by another key aesthetic term *shen* 神 (spirit; essence of things). To give two famous examples:

書之妙道，神彩為上，形質次之。（南朝齊・王僧虔）

Wang Sengqian from the Southern Qi (479-502): The mystical doctrine of calligraphy holds that uppermost [in this art] is the spiritual (*shen*) brilliance, after which the calligraphic form (*xing*) is second.

傳神者，必以形。（清・宋曹）

Song Cao from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911): To express the *shen* (spirit) [in a calligraphic work], one is bound to draw support from *xing* (form).

A basic meaning of *xing*, as I noted earlier, is the physical form of humans and other objects, and the polysemous term *shen* is often translated into English by the catchall “spirit”, hence the polarity *xing* / *shen*. Since the Han dynasty, as Cai Zongqi observed, “the proliferation [of *shen*] is very notable in discussions on authorial qualities, the creative process, the ranking of literary and art works, and the principles

of aesthetic judgment.”<sup>15</sup> In chapter 5 and 6 on calligraphic appreciation and evaluation, I will return to the concept *shen*. What needs to be pointed out here is that pre-Han and Han thinkers’ two approaches to the polarity of *spirit* / *body* persist in later Chinese calligraphy and art criticism, which are known as *zhong shen qing xing* 重神輕形 (a privilege of spirit over body) and *xing shen bing zhong* 形神並重 (an equal emphasis on spirit and body).<sup>16</sup> As Ronald Egan said of the polarity in early painting criticism:

The *xing* / *shen* polarity appears with regularity in early Chinese writings about painting, and can be summarized as follows: figures and other images depicted in painting have both *xing* and *shen*, and both are indispensable. But ultimately, *xing* is subordinate to *shen* insofar as what a painting should capture and convey. A painting must convey the *shen* of its subject matter if it is to be judged successful; a painting that depicts *xing* alone is necessarily an inferior work of art... [Gu Kaizhi] summarized the purpose of painting in the phrase “using the form to depict the *shen* (*yixing xieshen*), suggesting at once the inseparability of *shen* from the body and also its supremacy as the painter’s ultimate focus.”<sup>17</sup>

Egan’s observation can also be used to explain the above-cited two texts on the calligraphic polarity *xing* / *shen*. On one hand, as Wang Sengqian declared, the value of a calligraphic work primarily lies in its *shen*, rather than its form. On the other hand, to convey the *shen*, as Song Cao noted, a calligrapher needs to resort to the calligraphic form. One can take this polarity as a recurring theme in broad Chinese art criticism, but at this point it should be noted that the denotations of *xing* and *shen* in different contexts are not necessarily the same, for example, *shen* in portraiture and *shen* in landscape painting,<sup>18</sup> *xing* in painting and *xing* in calligraphy.

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<sup>15</sup> Cai, Zongqi. “The Conceptual Origins and Aesthetic Significance of *Shen* in Six Dynasties Texts on Literature and Painting”. In Cai, Zongqi, ed. *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004. 310-311.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>17</sup> Egan, Ronald. “Conceptual and Qualitative Terms in Historical Perspective”. In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 277-278.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the different denotations of *shen* in Chinese painting, see *ibid.*, 277-278.

The above description of *xing* aims to explain, first, the classical Chinese term *xing* as a counterpart of Western “form” has its own cultural context, and second, a proper understanding of calligraphic “form” necessitates a return to its distinctive discourses. These two points are of equal potency in the following discussion of another counterpart of the Western “form” – *xingshi* 形式.

*Xing* takes its root in Chinese tradition, whereas *xingshi* is an imported term. The modern term *xingshi*, as another generally accepted translation of the Western “form”, cannot find its provenance in ancient Chinese writings, and it was not known to Chinese people until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when the wind of absorbing Western learning swept over the Chinese intelligentsia. The subject of “Chinese aesthetics”, in the modern sense, is said to be a product of the collision and integration of the Western and Chinese cultures.<sup>19</sup> *Xingshi*, as a substitute for the classical *xing*, became a fundamental aesthetic category in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese discourses on calligraphy.

It is generally accepted that Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927), a pioneering scholar in early 20<sup>th</sup> century China, introduced the term *xingshi*. In 1902, Wang published his translation of *Tetsugaku Gairon* (哲學概論 or *Introduction to Philosophy*), a book written by the Japanese philosopher Kuwaki Genyoku (1874 – 1946). In Kuwaki’s book, the Japanese term 形式 (*keishiki*, meaning “form”), was a common concept, and Wang most probably directly borrowed this term in his Chinese translation.

Wang Guowei studied Kant’s aesthetic philosophy in the first few years of the twentieth century; according to Wang Keping, “from 1903 to 1907, he read Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* four times.”<sup>20</sup> Profoundly influenced by Kant’s “formalism”, in 1907 Wang Guowei wrote “On the Position of the Refined in Aesthetics” (*Guya zhi zai meixue shang zhi diwei* 古雅之在美學上之地位), a treatise, to many contemporary calligraphy theorists, that initiated modern calligraphy aesthetics, or

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<sup>19</sup> For a study on the history of twentieth-century Chinese aesthetics, see Ru, Xin, and Wang Desheng, eds. *Meixue de lishi: Ershi shiji zhongguo meixue xueshu jincheng* 美學的歷史：20 世紀中國美學學術進程 (A History of Aesthetics: The Advancement of Twentieth-century Chinese Aesthetics). Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2000.

<sup>20</sup> Wang, Keping. “Wang Guowei: Philosophy of Aesthetic Criticism”. In Cheng, Chung-Ying, and Nicholas Bunnin, eds. *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002. 37-56.

modern Chinese aesthetics at large. Wang's article bore the stamp of Western formalist theory, that all beauty is in essence formal beauty that lies in the symmetry, variety, and harmony of form. His treatise, however, dedicated only a small paragraph to calligraphy, in which he labelled it an 'inferior art' (*dideng zhi meishu* 低等之美術).

The 1920s is the first golden period for modern Chinese aesthetics. In 1920, Liu Renhang 劉仁航 (1884-1938) was the first to translate a foreign book on aesthetics, *Jinshi Meixue* (近世美學), or *Modern Aesthetics*, originally written in Japanese by Takayama Chogyū (1871-1902).<sup>21</sup> More than a dozen aesthetic books published during the 1920s, being either translated works or original works by Chinese scholars. Concerns discussed by Chinese aestheticians were often the same as those covered in Western aesthetics at the time, such as aesthetic feelings, aesthetic judgement, and form (*xingshi*). These new conceptions or categories were destined to reform calligraphy criticism in China. An early example was Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 (1873-1929) speech "A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy" (*Shufa zhidao* 書法指導), delivered at Tsinghua University in 1926.<sup>22</sup> Liang's talk was much influenced by Western aesthetic ideas, such as Kant's view that judgements of beauty are disinterested. Liang proposed that the beauty of Chinese calligraphy lies in four aspects: beauty of lines, beauty of light,<sup>23</sup> beauty of power, and expression of personality.

During the 1930s, some important texts on calligraphy – most of them written by scholars who had studied in Western countries – explicitly presented a formal discussion of this art. Deng Yizhe 鄧以蟄 (1892-1973), who had studied literature and aesthetics at Waseda University (1907-1911) and Columbia University (1917-1922), wrote his first article on calligraphy aesthetics in 1937. Entitled "Appreciation of Calligraphy" (*Shufa zhi xinshang* 書法之欣賞), Deng's article divided all art into two types: decorative art and pure art, and for him, Chinese calligraphy belongs to the latter. In discussing the nature of calligraphy, Deng wrote that:

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<sup>21</sup> Takayama, Chogyū. *Kinsei Bigaku* 近世美学 (Early Modern Aesthetics). Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1899.

<sup>22</sup> Liang Qichao's speech was included in: Zheng, Yizeng, ed. *Minguo shulun jingxuan* 民國書論精選 (Select Essays on Calligraphy in Republican China). Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2013. 15-29.

<sup>23</sup> According to Liang's speech, the light of calligraphic works refers to the variations of ink tones.

若言書法，則形式與意境又不可分……意境亦必托形式以顯……然意境究出於形式之後，非先有字之形制，書法不能產生也。故談書法，當自形質始。考書法之形質有三：一曰筆畫，二曰結體或體勢，三曰章法或行次。

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When it comes to calligraphy, *xingshi* (form) and *yijing* (idea-scape, or the mood) cannot be separated...*Yijing* must be presented by virtue of *xingshi*...*Yijing* is posterior to *xingshi*, and calligraphy as an art cannot be realised without the characters having shape. Thus, to discuss calligraphy, one should start with forms. Calligraphic form comprises the following three aspects: brushstroke (*bihua*), structure of individual characters (*jieti*), and compositional arrangement (*zhangfa*).

It's obvious that the *xing* / *shen* polarity, as it was used in pre-modern texts on calligraphy, reverberates here in the dichotomy between *xingshi* and *yijing*; the *xingshi* or form in calligraphy is credited with the central position. It also needs to be pointed out that Deng's dividing calligraphic form into three aspects, i.e. *bihua*, *jieti*, and *zhangfa*, was widely accepted by later calligraphy theorists, and was faithfully repeated in many modern discussions on calligraphic form.<sup>25</sup> In the same article, Deng took calligraphic brushstrokes, one of the three formal aspects he identified, to be the embodiment of the beauty of motion in calligraphic works:

書法之筆畫，非一畫之痕跡，而為人之指、腕與心運用筆墨之事以流出之

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<sup>24</sup> Deng, Yizhe. "Shufa zhi xinshang" 書法之欣賞 (Appreciation of Calligraphy). In Xiao, Peijin, ed. *Jin xian dai shu lun jing xuan* 近現代書論精選 (Selected Texts on Calligraphy in the Modern Period). Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 2014. 113-114.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Fu Shen has studied Huang Tingjian's calligraphy from these three points of view, i.e. brushwork, internal structure and spatial arrangement, stating that "this method of analysis may be used as a tool in studying any work of calligraphy." Fu, Shen. "Huang Tingjian's Calligraphy and His Scroll for Chang Ta-T'ung: A Masterpiece Written in Exile." Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1976. For more examples, see Jin, Xuezhai. *Shufa meixue tan* 書法美學談 (Discussions on the Aesthetics of Calligraphy). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1984; Chen, Tingyou. *Shufa meixue xintan* 書法美學新探 (A New Exploration of the Aesthetics of Calligraphy). Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1997.

美。<sup>26</sup>

Brushstrokes in calligraphy are not the traces of individual lines, but the overflowing beauty out of the brush and ink controlled by the calligrapher's finger, wrist, and mind.

Also in the 1930s, writing on calligraphy by two other Chinese scholars who mainly wrote in English, Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976) and Chiang Yee 蔣彝 (1903-1977), directed attention to the importance of form in understanding this art. Crediting calligraphy with the central position in the Chinese artistic tradition, Lin Yutang, in his first English book *My Country and My People*, stated:

So fundamental is the place of calligraphy in Chinese art *as a study of form and rhythm in the abstract* that we may say it has provided the Chinese people with a basic esthetics, and it is through calligraphy that the Chinese have learnt their basic notions of line and form.<sup>27</sup>

To explain rhythm and form, Lin Yutang proposed an “animistic principle”. According to this principle, Chinese calligraphers, in exploring rhythms and forms, have derived “artistic inspiration from nature, especially from plants and animals.”<sup>28</sup> It is commonplace for traditional calligraphy criticism to compare calligraphic forms with images drawn from nature, and Lin Yutang's “animistic principle” certainly inherited this tradition in some ways.

In 1938, Chiang Yee published *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to Its Aesthetic and Technique*, the first detailed English monograph on Chinese calligraphy. In a chapter titled “The Abstract Beauty of Chinese Calligraphy”, Chiang succinctly

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<sup>26</sup> Deng, Yizhe. “Shufa zhi xinshang” 書法之欣賞 (Appreciation of Calligraphy). In Xiao, Peijin, ed. *Jin xian dai shu lun jing xuan* 近現代書論精選 (Selected Texts on Calligraphy in the Modern Period). Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 2014. 120.

<sup>27</sup> Lin, Yutang. *My Country and My People*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935. 291.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

stated that “the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy is simply this: that a beautiful form should be beautifully executed.”<sup>29</sup> By “abstract beauty”, he referred to the beauty of calligraphic lines, the beauty achieved in lively forms. Chiang noticed the fundamental role of calligraphy to Chinese arts, and also observed the relationship between dynamic calligraphic form and natural imagery, as we saw, an idea which evolved in the Han dynasty. A novelty of his aesthetics, however, lies in his connecting the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy with the aesthetics of modern abstract art, in his contention that the “significant forms” in calligraphy are a representation of reality as well as a simulation of the lively forms in nature.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2 The calligraphic *shi*

The beginning of this chapter made it clear that *xing* and *shi* constitute a mutual dependent pair in calligraphic discourses, where the former means “shape” or “calligraphic form”, and the latter often refers to the momentum, or force, inherent in the calligraphic form. *Xingshi*, as well as the above-mentioned *xingsheng*, is a common combined term in calligraphy criticism. If the relation between *xing* and *shen* is generally characterised as a polarity, *xing* and *shi* tend to form a symbiotic relationship. That is to say, if we want to grasp the calligraphic *xing*, we need to examine the calligraphic *shi*.

The combined term *xingshi* first appeared in the pre-Qin texts on military strategy. In *Liu Tao* 六韜 (The Six Secret Teachings), a military classic that dates from the Warring State period (470-221 BC), *xingshi* was employed twice, one of which has it that:

凡深入敵人之地，必察地之形勢，務求便利。<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Chiang, Yee. *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973. 110.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>31</sup> Lü, Shang, trans. and comm. *Liu tao yizhu* 六韜譯注 (Annotated Translation of the Six Secret Teachings). Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 1992. 147.

In general, when you venture deep beyond the enemy's borders you must investigate the configuration [*xing*] and strategic advantages [*shi*] of the terrain, and concentrate on seeking out and improving the advantages.<sup>32</sup>

In this context, *xing* is understood as the configuration or shape of the things in the battlefield, and *shi*, according to Francois Jullien, “the potential born of the disposition”<sup>33</sup>, rendered above by Ralph Sawyer as “strategic advantages”. For a general in warfare, his priority is to have a clear understanding of the particular configuration or situation at hand, and then he should “aim to exploit, to his own advantage and to maximum effect, whatever conditions he encounters.”<sup>34</sup> The combined term *xingshi* was rarely employed in other military classics, but *shi*, with its prevalence among treatises such as *Sunzi bingfa* 孫子兵法 (The Art of War), was established as a key concept. And the basic meaning of the term *shi*, as it was used in various military treatises, remains unchanged, insofar as it arises from the objective situation, the configuration or *xing* of the external things.

*Xingshi* is an even more common term in the Confucian classics and historical records produced during the Han dynasty, referring, for the most part, to “the configuration of power relations in politics”<sup>35</sup> and political force or influence. I do not intend to discuss further the semantics of the term *xingshi* as it was used in works such as *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian) and *Lun heng* 論衡 (Arguments Weighed). What I want to point out is that, when *xingshi* first appeared as an artistic category in the Eastern-Han scholar Cai Yong's calligraphic treatise *Jiu shi* 九勢 (Nine Types of *Shi*), the semantic relation between *xing* and *shi* in the sense given by Cai is consistent with that established in pre-Qin and Han texts. That is to say, Cai Yong's understanding of calligraphic *xing* and *shi* as “being mutually reflected” (*di*

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<sup>32</sup> Translation cited from Sawyer, Ralph D., and Mei-chün Sawyer. *The Seven Military Classics of Ancient China: Wu Ching ch'i Shu*. New York: Basic Books, 2007. 85.

<sup>33</sup> Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>35</sup> This translation of *xingshi* in Chinese politics is borrowed from Jullien. Ibid., 40.



*xiang ying dai* 遞相映帶) has its source in earlier philosophical and military treatises,<sup>36</sup> where *xing* and *shi* were defined in terms of each other. On one hand, the *shi* (potential, tendency, momentum) of a thing needs to be embodied in a certain form (*xing*), or *xing* is the state of a thing's tendency or momentum (*shi*) being represented. On the other hand, it is generally believed – and even more readily understandable – that the *shi* of an object, as a quality or effect, “depend[s] upon the perceiver's interpretation” of the visible shape (*xing*) of the object.<sup>37</sup> As the early Tang scholar-statesman Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579-648) annotated on the second chapter, *Xingshi*, in *Guanzi* 管子, a philosophical text attributed to Guan Zhong 管仲 (fl. 685-645 BC):

自天地以及萬物……莫不有形勢焉，夫勢必因形而立。<sup>38</sup>

Of the Heaven and Earth and all the things in the world...none is not possessed of *xingshi* (configuration and stance); *shi* is founded on *xing*.

I have discussed the correlation between *xing* and *shi*. In the following discussion, I turn to the calligraphic *shi*. Though *shi* has long been used independently in texts on calligraphy, I believe one can easily find the term's relation to calligraphic *xing* (form). An interesting way to observe this is to review the interesting ways sinologists paid attention to this idea.

In a seminal article on calligraphic theory, John Hay wrote that, “‘Force-form’ is my translation of *shih* [*shi* 勢]. It is the form of becoming, process and, by extension, movement. Shape, *hsing* [*xing* 形], is the outer shell of manifested process, fixed yet transient.”<sup>39</sup> Making reference to Hay's rendition, Jullien further explicated the the

<sup>36</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 6. Translation of the term based on: Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 79.

<sup>37</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 590.

<sup>38</sup> Li, Xiangfeng. *Guanzi jiaozhu* 管子校註 (A Collation and Annotation of *Guanzi*). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Hay, John. “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy”. In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 102.

term:

*shi* can be defined overall as the *force* that runs through the *form* of the written character and animates it aesthetically...It is an in-between term, at times relating to the invisible, subjective, and cosmic energy pervading and operating through the activity of calligraphy, at other times relating to the shape or form of the individual ideograms at the definitive stage when each is set down; in the latter case it tends to be fused with that particular configuration.<sup>40</sup>

“In-between” is an interesting and tangible expression here, revealing the fluctuating nature of calligraphic *shi*, suggesting that *shi* can work in various dimensions of calligraphic practice. At one end of the spectrum, as Jullien said, *shi* is bound to *xing*, the visible and static form. At the other end, as a kind of configurational tendency or force that inheres in calligraphic form, *shi* refers to the directionality of a complete movement in calligraphic creative process.<sup>41</sup> Such a view is shared by several researchers. In an influential article titled “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”, Yu-kung Kao wrote:

In the early criticism of calligraphy, *hsing* [*xing*] refers to the static form, *shih* [*shi*] to the potential interaction between forms. But when movement is understood as an indispensable part of calligraphy, the controlled *shih* [*shi*] is then the configuration, analogous to a course through which the torrent flows. When finally movement is seen as propulsion, *shih* [*shi*] is the force itself with all its potential momentum ready to be released.<sup>42</sup>

In a similar manner, Mathias Obert wrote the following in a recent article on calligraphy:

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<sup>40</sup> Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 76-78.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 591.

<sup>42</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”. In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 80.

The notion of *shi* 勢, rendered as “impulse and *gestalt*,” is crucial. *Shi* at the same time means the dynamic tendency of a movement, as well as the fixed *gestalt*, the latter all in one being the static outcome of this movement, its vibrant trace, and an evocative expression of its still lasting dynamics.<sup>43</sup>

From the above definitions of *shi*, it is reasonable to infer the following conclusions. First, the calligraphic *shi* and calligraphic *xing* are interdependent. Second, calligraphic *xing* is often understood as a static form, and successful calligraphic creation produces calligraphic forms with energy, and produces what Stephen Owen described as “lines of force.”<sup>44</sup> And the other way round, it is safe to say that not all brushstrokes in calligraphic works express a tendency toward dynamism (*shi*). Third, the formal elements (*xing*) of a calligraphic work, along with the internal energy or force (*shi*) from which that formal elements has proceeded,<sup>45</sup> are likely to be perceived by the viewers as a whole. It is in this sense that Obert’s translation of the term as *gestalt* is not unreasonable: the calligraphic form and the force inherent in the form can be sensed by the beholder at the same instant. An individual Chinese character in a calligraphic work, as Jean Francois Billeter observed, “comes before us as a dual entity: static as a form and dynamic as a gesture.”<sup>46</sup> Fourth, calligraphic *shi*, as a kind of aesthetic effect as well as directional force, is indeed brought about by the calligrapher’s gesture or body movement. In the fourth chapter on calligraphic creation, I’ll turn to this last point.

Having reviewed several sinologists’ explanations of calligraphic *shi*, the following discussion returns to the term’s usages in classical calligraphic theory. I take it as an uncontroversial thesis that calligraphic *shi*, as advanced by several theorists, can

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<sup>43</sup> Obert, Mathias. “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 12.4 (2013): 533.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 591.

<sup>45</sup> Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 78.

<sup>46</sup> Billeter, Jean Francois. *The Chinese Art of Writing*. New York: Rizzoli, 1990. 86.

be understood as a kind of directional force or dynamism running through calligraphic *xing* or form. But, such a statement sounds quite general, considering that calligraphic form has various dimensions or levels. And if we are to understand how calligraphic *shi* relates to – or acts on – a Chinese conception of artistic form, we need to explicate how *shi* persists through the three aspects of calligraphic form, i.e. brushstrokes, characters and the compositional arrangement.

### 2.3 *Shi* and the three aspects of calligraphic forms

Individual brushstrokes can be regarded as the smallest unit of a calligraphic work: they constitute individual characters, and a combination of characters constitutes the whole work. A calligraphic work is thus the culmination of progressive individual lines. As the Qing calligrapher and theorist Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775-1855) wrote:

夫字始於畫，畫必有起有止。合眾畫以成字，合眾字以成篇。每畫既自成體勢，眾有體勢者合，自然顧盼朝揖出其中。<sup>47</sup>

Characters start with strokes, and every stroke has a beginning and an end. A combination of strokes forms characters, and a combination of characters forms a whole work. As long as every stroke has its own *ti-shi* (shape and force), when a multitude of *ti-shi* are brought together, the cooperation and attraction [between the individual brushstrokes] will naturally flow.

For Bao, when the impulse (*shi*) inheres in every single completed calligraphic stroke, the whole work will naturally achieve a dynamic effect (*shi*). His conviction might arouse controversy, as it ignores the complex operation of *shi* within characters and the overall structure. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the importance of executing individual

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<sup>47</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Qing qianqi shulun* 清前期書論 (Early Qing Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2003. 426.

lines of force (*shi*) has been echoed in many calligraphic treatises. In *Xu shu pu* 續書譜 (Sequel to the “Treatise on Calligraphy”), the Song scholar Jiang Kui 姜夔 (1155-1221) wrote that, “In horizontal, slanting, curved, and straight lines, hooks, circular lines, and spirals, strength [*shi*] is the most important element” (橫斜曲直，鉤環盤紆，皆以勢為主).<sup>48</sup> In a late Tang calligraphic treatise, Lin Yun 林蘊 (fl. 860) relayed Lu Zhao’s 盧肇 (fl. 843) advice about learning calligraphy:

大凡點畫，不在拘於長短遠近，但勿遏其勢……若平直相似，狀如算子，此畫爾，非書也。<sup>49</sup>

On the whole, dots and lines don’t have to be restrained by length and distance. Nonetheless, one should not hold back the internal energy (*shi*) [within the brushstrokes]...When horizontal and vertical strokes resemble each other, they look like the beads of an abacus; they are merely lines, not calligraphy.

What, then, is the *shi* of an individual line? And more importantly, how does a calligrapher achieve *shi* in the execution of calligraphic lines? Answers to these questions can be found in a large body of traditional texts on *bishi* 筆勢 (*shi* of the brush or brushstroke). In an early calligraphic treatise attributed to Wei Shuo 衛鑠 (272-349), one can read that:

一，如千里陣雲，隱隱然其實有形。

、，如高峰墜石，磕磕然實如崩也。

丿，陸斷犀象。

乚，百鈞弩發。

<sup>48</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 241. Translation cited from Chang, Ch’ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 21.

<sup>49</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhong wan tang wudai shulun* 中晚唐五代書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy from the Mid- and Late Tang and the Five Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 247.

| , 萬歲枯藤。

乚, 崩浪雷奔。

冂, 勁弩筋節。<sup>50</sup>

— A horizontal line – Like a cloud formation stretching a thousand *li*; indistinct, but not without form;

丶 A dot – Like a stone falling from a high peak, bouncing and crashing, about to shatter;

丿 *Pie* or inclining leftward stroke – The tusk of an elephant or rhinoceros (thrust into and) broken by the ground;

ㄣ *Ge* hook – Fired from a three thousand pound crossbow;

| A vertical line – A withered vine, ten thousand years old;

乚 A “phoenix-wing hook” – Crashing waves or rolling thunder;

冂 A “enclosing hook” – The sinews and joints of a mighty bow.<sup>51</sup>

In classical calligraphy criticism, illustrations of brushstrokes like the above abound. Obviously, the focus of a calligraphic critic is not the physical shape or geometrical configuration of the lines. Given that such illustrations have been used as instruction manuals for beginners to master basic calligraphic lines, it can be said that formal training in calligraphy, from the outset, emphasises the force (*shi*) in the form rather than the *xing* (shape) of the form. This might explain why Lu Zhao would say lines don’t have to be restrained by the length, but the *shi* within must not be obstructed.

I have translated the *shi* of individual brushstrokes as “lines of force or internal

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<sup>50</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Translation based on Barnhart, Richard M. “Wei Fu-Jen’s Pi Chen T’u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy.” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

energy”. This type of *shi*, as a kind of aesthetic effect or quality, may not be readily visible to a common viewer or a student of this art. And therefore, it becomes perfectly understandable that a calligraphic theorist like Wei Shuo, who was also a teacher of the celebrated calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之(303-361), would resort to metaphors that use natural objects.<sup>52</sup> By an analogy with the *shi* (stance or movement) of the things of the objective world in which artistic practitioners exist, it naturally goes, beginners and masters of this art can have a better understanding of the *shi* in calligraphy. I discussed in the first section Lin Yutang’s “animistic principle”, by which he meant that Chinese calligraphers get inspiration from natural objects in the exploration of calligraphic forms. Perhaps, Lin’s principle can be put in another way: Chinese calligraphers perceive the *shi* existing in the natural objects, and then draw such *shi* from the natural world into calligraphy (*qushi* 取勢), into the refinement of the *shi* of a certain calligraphic script (*shu shi* 書勢).<sup>53</sup> With that being said, we can now understand lyrical expressions like “a dot resembles a falling stone from a high peak”. It’s not that a dot in calligraphy should represent the form of a falling stone, but that a dot should carry a kind of momentum bearing a resemblance to that of a falling stone.

Chinese characters, nearly all of which consist of more than one stroke, come as the second level of calligraphic form. And just as an individual line should achieve *shi*, the structure of a calligraphic ideogram also needs to obtain *shi*, here as an effect of tension in relations between the individual strokes (*jiezi yao deshi* 結字要得勢).<sup>54</sup> In a famous passage from *Jiu shi*, Cai Yong wrote:

凡落筆結字，上皆覆下，下以承上，使其形勢遞相映帶。<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Sun, Li. “Shi shi: yige jingdian fanchou de xingcheng” 釋勢：一個經典範疇的形成 (An Interpretation of *Shi*: The Formation of a Classic Category). *Journal of Peking University* 48.6 (2011): 32.

<sup>53</sup> For discussions on *qushi*, see Gao, Jianping. *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting*. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012. 182-188.

<sup>54</sup> Xu, Yongxi. “Zixue zhaji” 字學劄記 (Notes on Calligraphy). In Cui, Erping, ed. *Mingqing shufa lunwen xuan* 明清書法論文選 (A Selected Anthology of Ming and Qing Texts on Calligraphy). Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1994. 512.

<sup>55</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 6.

Whenever one puts brush to paper and completes a character, one should always make the preceding strokes anticipate the ensuing ones and make the ensuing ones in response to the preceding ones. The *xing* and *shi* of the strokes should be in mutual reflection.<sup>56</sup>

To obtain the structural dynamism or *shi* within an individual character, a calligrapher should pay attention to two aspects. The first aspect concerns the writing of two neighbouring strokes, as dictated above by Cai Yong. In describing how the *shi* of two consecutive lines should act with each other, Cai Yong employed two verbs – *fu* 覆 (respond; reply to) and *cheng* 承 (continue, carry on). The *shi* of the first of two linked strokes anticipates that of the following one, and the *shi* of the second stroke replies to that of the previous one. The second aspect to be considered is that a calligrapher should create an effect of structural force within all the strokes of a character, an idea expressed at the beginning of Zhang Huaiguan's 張懷瓘 (act. 713-741) *Yongbi shifa* 用筆十法 (On Ten Methods of Using the Brush):

兩字並為一字，須求點畫上下偃仰離合之勢。<sup>57</sup>

When two characters (or two components) form into one single character, *shi* must be achieved, both for dots and for strokes, through the creation of tension between top and bottom, lowering-lifting, separating-gathering together.<sup>58</sup>

Achieving the *shi* in a calligraphic ideogram is thus a more complex operation than achieving the *shi* in an independent stroke. Brushstrokes linked together need to

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<sup>56</sup> Translation based on Gao, Jianping. *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting*. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012. 182; and Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 79, 133.

<sup>57</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhang huaiguan shulun* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan's Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 269.

<sup>58</sup> Translation based on Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 78.



respond to one another, and in the meantime, all of the lines that constitute a character “must either attract or repel another, either ‘turn to face another’ or ‘turn its back on another’ [*xiangbei* 向背]”.<sup>59</sup> In so doing, a single character in a work of calligraphy, as Jullien described, creates a “magnetic field”<sup>60</sup>, through which the *shi* flows.

The concept of “magnetic field” can also be used to describe the force-form (*shi*) of a calligraphic work’s overall composition (*zhangfa* 章法), the *shi* of the highest level of calligraphic form. *Shi* of the overall compositional structure is of crucial importance for a successful calligraphic work, as a viewer’s first impression of the work relies mainly on the immediate perception of the overall dynamic configuration. This point may be better understood if we recollect Obert’s rendition of *shi* as *gestalt*. And applying a principle of Gestalt psychology, it can be said that the overall configurational force of a calligraphic work transcends the sum of the *shi* of its constituent elements. To describe the operation of *shi* or the dynamic configuration of a whole work, it is worthwhile citing the Ming scholar-official Xie Jin 解縉 (1369-1415):

上字之於下字，左行之於右行，橫斜疏密，各有攸當。上下連延，左右顧矚，八面四方，有如佈陣。<sup>61</sup>

A character as it is related to the next character, a column [of characters] as it is related to the next column, all need to achieve a proper balance of horizontal tendency and slanting tendency, of looseness and tightness. Two neighbouring characters should link up with one another, two neighbouring columns should have “eye contact”. [The arrangement of] all sides and directions [of a calligraphic work] is like the arraying of military forces.

## Conclusion

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>61</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Mingdai shulun* 明代書論 (Ming Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002. 8.

In this chapter, I endeavoured to demonstrate that calligraphic *xing* and *shi* are mutually dependent. According to calligraphy theory from Han dynasty on, the forms of successful calligraphic works are never static, rather they should be filled with internal force (*shi*). If we choose Hay's translation of *shi* as force-form, *shi* becomes a stipulation on which rests the validity of calligraphic *xing* (form). In the meantime, the calligraphic *shi*, as an aesthetic effect, cannot exist by itself and is only perceptible as a visual property that defines calligraphic form. Some twentieth-century calligraphy theorists employed Clive Bell's "Significant Form" to characterise Chinese calligraphic form,<sup>62</sup> which, I believe, is not appropriate to explain the notion of form or *xing* in Chinese calligraphy, because *xing* and *shi* are interdependent, and "Significant Form" lacks "the forcefulness and the unfolding temporality" of *shi*.<sup>63</sup>

Stressing the force of artistic form is not unique to Chinese aesthetic discourse. Several Western art theorists from the twentieth century have touched upon this point in their discussions of visual art forms. For example, in Wassily Kandinsky's 1926 book *Point and Line to Plane*, "force" is a frequently mentioned concept linking the three elements of point, line and plane. There is the force or tension within a point, in the first place, and then comes the tension in lines where it could be understood as the "force living within the element" and represents a part of the creative movement.<sup>64</sup> And eventually, Kandinsky wrote, "A composition is nothing other than an exact law-abiding organization of the vital forces which, in the form of tensions, are shut up within the elements."<sup>65</sup> Another concept that is analogous to "force-form" is "living form", proposed by the American philosopher Susanne Langer. For a work to be successful, to have artistic vitality, Langer declared, "it presents us with something quite properly,

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<sup>62</sup> For example, Li Zehou, an influential contemporary Chinese philosopher, wrote that purified lines of Chinese calligraphy "do not represent formal or ornamental beauty, as do designs and patterns in general, but are 'significant forms' in the true sense." Li, Zehou; Gong Lizeng, trans. *The Path of Beauty: A Study of Chinese Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 37.

<sup>63</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 231.

<sup>64</sup> Kandinsky, Wassily; Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay, trans. *Point and Line to Plane*. New York: Dover Publications, 1979. 57.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

even though metaphorically, called ‘living form’.”<sup>66</sup> In many respects, Langer’s depiction of “living form” is analogous to the force-form of calligraphy. It is, as Langer said, “dynamic form...organically constructed; its elements are not independent parts, but interrelated; the whole system is held together by rhythmic processes.”<sup>67</sup> Just as the calligraphic *shi* can be understood as a special kind of visual effect or aesthetic quality, the “living form”, in the sense Langer means, also “carries with it something that people have sometimes called a quality...sometimes an emotional content, or the emotional tone of a work, or simply its life.”<sup>68</sup> As we have seen, the *shi* in calligraphy also “suggests the breath that lives” in the calligraphic lines.<sup>69</sup> As the eighth-century art critic Zhang Huaiguan wrote,

勢以生之。<sup>70</sup>

It is *shi* (force-form) that gives life [to calligraphy].

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<sup>66</sup> Langer, Susanne K. *Problems of Art: Ten Philosophical Lectures*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957. 128.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>69</sup> Jullien, François. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 78.

<sup>70</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhang huaiguan shulun* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan’s Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 237.

## Chapter 3

### Being a Disciple of the Past

(*yu gu wei tu* 與古為徒)

Having examined the genres of calligraphy and calligraphic form, this and the following chapter turn to examine calligraphic creation. In Western aesthetics, formal theories tend to be distinct from the discussions of artistic creation; the former views works of art as pleasing formal arrangements, while the latter emphasises that “works of art are products of human action – made things.”<sup>1</sup> In Chinese calligraphy theory, however, the distinction between calligraphic form and creation is not that clear-cut. Descriptions of calligraphic forms, for example, are commonly accompanied with accounts of brushworks in calligraphic commentaries.

Techniques or skills are prerequisite for artistic creation, but this and the next chapter do not illustrate specific writing techniques, such as the methods of using the brush (*bifa* 筆法) and the methods of using the ink (*mofa* 墨法). Rather, I will examine the ways calligraphers obtain skills, the role of tradition in calligraphic practice, and the calligraphic creative process. A sequence underlying these topics is that every Chinese calligrapher should start with learning from the past before embarking on his or her own creation, hence these two chapters, respectively, on the persistence of the past and the process of calligraphic creation.

#### 3.1 Tradition and artistic creation

Artistic creation is never a hermetic practice within which artists create something completely new without any reference to the past. Such a past, in Anglophone literary

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<sup>1</sup> Eldridge, Richard. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 68.

criticism and aesthetics, is often delineated by the term “tradition”, while in Chinese artistic criticism it is specified by the term *gu* 古. Both the two terms – tradition and *gu* – imply that artistic practices, be it in Europe or East Asia, will inevitably encounter the past. What distinguishes these two terms are the different attitudes taken by Chinese and the Western artists and art theorists towards the past, and the different values underlying these attitudes.

In Western art theory and literary criticism, the influences of the past could be roughly divided into the negative and the positive; Harold Bloom’s “anxiety”, perhaps, best grasps the ambivalence. Representative of the negative view of the past, to quote Harold Bloom, is “the Freudian idea that tradition is ‘equivalent to repressed material in the mental life of the individual’”.<sup>2</sup> The negative past as the repressed material, however, may not be understood as having no merit. More precisely, the negative past has the potential to become a positive factor in achieving creativity, a sentiment expressed in José Ortega y Gasset’s *The Dehumanization of Art*:

What will the reaction of creative originality upon the beauty of previous works be like? It may be positive or negative. Either the artist is in conformity with the past and regards it as his heritage which he feels called upon to perfect; or he discovers that he has a spontaneous indefinable aversion against established and generally acclaimed art. And as in the first case he will be pleased to settle down in the customary forms and repeat some of their patterns, thus he will, in the second, not only deviate from established tradition but be equally pleased to give to his work an explicit note of protest against the time-honored norms.<sup>3</sup>

Ortega’s discussion of the role of tradition is a part of his penetrating critique of what he considers the dehumanized nature of modern art. For Ortega, conforming to

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<sup>2</sup> Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Ortega y Gasset, José. *The Dehumanization of Art: And Other Writings on Art and Culture*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956. 40.

artistic tradition is a positive reaction on the part of modern artists, while revolting against the past is a negative one. But in terms of the final results, he argues that the two roles of the past in artistic practice should be inverted: adhering to the “traditional styles hampers the direct and original communication between the nascent artist and the world around him”, while artists’ antagonism towards past art brings about something new.<sup>4</sup>

For another group of artistic and literary theorists, tradition is a more positive concept, especially in its relation to creativity or originality. In the realm of visual art, for example, the German philosopher Walter Benjamin contended that “the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition”, an idea echoed by the American art critic Clement Greenberg when he wrote that “without the past of art, and without the need and compulsion to maintain past standards of excellence, such a thing as Modernist art would be impossible.”<sup>5</sup> In the realm of literary theory, critics such as T. S. Eliot and Harold Bloom held that there is no original poetry which owes nothing to the past, and artistic creativity or originality relies upon a sense of tradition.<sup>6</sup>

Before turning to the role of the past (or *gu*) in Chinese calligraphic practice, it should be noted that attention to the past, in the above-mentioned Western critics’ writings, is always connected with – or directed to – present artistic creation. The historical sense on the part of an artist, as Eliot observed, “involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence.”<sup>7</sup> Eliot’s point of view would not surprise a Chinese reader, for Chinese art theories are not short of discussions on the role of the past in present artistic creation, discussions that are epitomised by the Chinese combined term *gu-jin* 古今 (*gu* means “the past”, and *jin* “the present”).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>5</sup> Greenberg, Clement. “Modernist Painting”. In Frascina, Francis, and Charles Harrison, eds. *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*. London: Harper & Row, 1982. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Eliot, T. S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997. 39-49; Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Eliot, T. S. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber, 1997. 40.

<sup>8</sup> The concept of *gu-jin* has been widely used in philosophical and historical texts from pre-Qin and Han dynasties, notably in *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), suggesting that an early Chinese conception of history emphasises the historical experience, and perceives the present as the inheritance of the past.

This chapter focuses on the past and present in calligraphic practice, and addresses three questions: What is the role of the past in Chinese calligraphy and Chinese art at large? How do Chinese calligraphers learn from the past? Is the importance attached to the past an obstacle for the present artistic creation of Chinese calligraphers?

### 3.2 The role of the past

An emphasis on the past is a major feature in Chinese, and even wider East Asian, artistic practices.<sup>9</sup> In China, critical discussions of poetry, prose, calligraphy and painting all stress the artists' studying, understanding and mastering of the past. In the realm of painting theory, a famous example is the last of Xie He's 謝赫 (act. 500-535) "Six Principles" or six conditions for good paintings: *chuan yi mu xie* 傳移模寫, literally, "transmitting-transferring-copying-writing".<sup>10</sup> This is taken to mean that the painter should copy models from the earlier masters.<sup>11</sup>

In the history of Chinese literature, the role of the past has manifested in waves of archaism since the Tang dynasty (618-907). Like painters, Chinese writers always look back to their predecessors in honing their techniques. Writers, however, have more anxieties or moral pressures than painters while imitating the ancients. If Chinese painters and calligraphers mainly imitate the brushstroke techniques of ancient masters, which part of the model literary works can be rightly imitated, if not plagiarised, by a writer? When He Jingming 何景明 (1483-1521), a famous Ming dynasty writer, once criticised his contemporary Li Mengyang 李夢陽 (1473-1530) for the latter's being a "mere shadow of the ancients", Li replied that:

古之工，如倕，如班，堂非不殊，戶非同也，至其為方也，圓也，弗能舍

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<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of the role of the past in Japanese visual aesthetics, see Bullen, Richard. "Refining the Past". *British Journal of Aesthetics* 50.3 (2010): 243-254.

<sup>10</sup> Translation cited from Fong, Wen. "The Problems of Forgeries in Chinese Painting. Part One". *Artibus Asiae* 25 (1962): 95.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion of Xie He's "Six Principles", see Sirén, Osvald. *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Translations and Comments*. New York: Schocken Books, 1963. 18-28; Cahill, James. "The Six Laws and How to Read Them". *Ars Orientalis* 4 (1961): 372-381; Hay, John. "Values and History in Chinese Painting, I: Hsieh Ho Revisited.". *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 6 (1983): 72-111.

規矩。何也？規矩者，法也。僕之尺尺而寸寸之者，固法也。假令僕竊古之意，盜古形，剪截古辭以為文，謂之影子誠可。若以我之情，述今之事，尺寸古法，罔襲其辭，猶班圓倕之圓，倕方班之方，而倕之木，非班之木也。此奚不可也？<sup>12</sup>

Ancient craftsmen like Ch'ui and Pan built different halls and dissimilar doors, but when it came to making a square or a circle, they could not do without the carpenter's square or the compasses. Why? Because these represent the rules [*fa*]. When I follow the ancients foot by foot and inch by inch, I am really following the rules. If I had stolen the ideas of the ancients, or pilfered the forms of the ancients, or cut and tailored the words of the ancients to be my own literary works, then you could certainly call me a "shadow." But if I take my own feelings and describe contemporary events while following the rules of the ancients foot by foot and inch by inch, without plagiarizing their words, this is comparable to Pan making a circle like Ch'ui's circle or Ch'ui making a square like Pan's square, while Ch'ui's wood was not the same as Pan's wood. Why should this not be allowed?<sup>13</sup>

Learning from the past, for Li Mengyang, is to imitate the rules or methods (*fa* 法) rather than copy others' words or ideas. In his influential *Chinese Theories of Literature*, literary theorist James Liu categorised Li Mengyang's approach to the past as a technical conception of literature which led him to "believe in archaism and the observance of rules and methods".<sup>14</sup>

As a calligrapher himself, Li Mengyang didn't need to defend his practice of imitating the calligraphic works of the Tang masters like Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638)

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<sup>12</sup> Li, Mengyang. "Bo He shi lunwen shu" 駁何氏論文書 (Arguments against He Jingming's Views). In Guo, Shaoyu, ed. *Zhongguo lidai wenlun xuan* 中國歷代文論選 (Selected Essays on Chinese Literary Theories through the Ages). Vol. 3. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2001. 46.

<sup>13</sup> Translation based on Liu, James Jo-Yu. *Chinese Theories of Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975. 91.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 90-92.



and Ouyang Xun 歐陽詢 (557-641), for *shufa* 書法 (writing-method) – the Chinese term for calligraphy – suggests a disciplinary difference. Recognising the distinct attitudes towards the past as taken by Chinese writers and calligraphers, the seventeenth-century scholar and calligrapher Fu Shan 傅山 (1607-1684) wrote that:

字與文不同者，字一筆不似古人，即不成字，文若為古人作印版，尚得謂之文耶？<sup>15</sup>

Calligraphy and prose or prosimetric writings are different. So long as any single stroke of a calligraphic work is not modelled on the ancient calligraphers, it does not qualify as calligraphy. But if prose or prosimetric writing rigidly follows the ancient writers, how can one still call it a literary work?

Learning from the past, from the initial period of self-conscious calligraphic practice in China during the Six Dynasties, has been regarded as the proper course to take in becoming a mature calligrapher. This idea was put forward in the opening paragraph of *Bi zhen tu* 筆陣圖 (Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush), an influential early calligraphic treatise attributed to Wei Shuo 衛鑠 (272-349):

故知達其源者少，暗於理者多。近代以來，殊不師古，而緣情棄道，才記姓名，或學不該贍，問見又寡，致使成功不就，虛費精神。<sup>16</sup>

Thus we know that those who have attained to the origins (of calligraphy) are few, while those who are in ignorance of its principles are many. Recent generations in particular have not sought the teachings of the ancients; following their emotions and abandoning the Tao, they succeed only in

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<sup>15</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Qing qianqi shulun* 清前期書論 (Early Qing Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2003. 12, 79.

<sup>16</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 21.

remembering the names (of the great calligraphers of the past). Some study, but insufficiently, and what they have seen and heard, too, is inadequate, with the result that their efforts at accomplishment fall short, and they waste their energy in vain.<sup>17</sup>

Wei Shuo was the teacher of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361), commonly called the “Sage of Calligraphy” as noted in Chapter One. Since the Tang dynasty (619-907), calligraphers have included the two Wangs – Wang Xizhi and his son Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344-386) – while discussing the calligraphic canons. According to the above treatise, one written before the two Wangs’ time, it could be speculated that Wang Xizhi and the preceding calligraphers relied on ancient masters to achieve success; and that they believed that calligraphic practice without a sufficient study of the past leads to nothing. This point of view has been reiterated throughout calligraphy history. As the late Qing art theorist Liu Xizai 劉熙載 (1813-1881) wrote in the third sentence of his *Shu gai* 書概 (A Précis of Calligraphy):

與天為徒，與古為徒，皆學書者所有事也。<sup>18</sup>

To be a disciple of nature, to be a follower of the past; [these] determine the scope of studying calligraphy.

To some degree, the above idiom of *yu gu wei tu* 與古為徒, or “being a disciple of the past”, expresses a general aesthetic preference for antiquities in China; its usage goes beyond calligraphy theory to describe a reverence towards the past in the diverse fields of painting, literature, collecting, and social norms. However, among the three arts (of literature, painting and calligraphy), it is in the field of calligraphy that most

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<sup>17</sup> Translation from Barnhart, Richard M. “Wei Fu-Jen’s Pi Chen T’u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy.” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

<sup>18</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 682.

attention is given to artistic continuity and tradition. *Gu*, the past, permeates the practice of every calligrapher. Be he or she a beginner of calligraphic practice, or a veteran of this art, copying the canonical models and imitating the masters' brushstroke methods are just their regular daily drills.

### 3.3 Learning from the past

It is necessary to properly examine *gu* – the past – in Chinese calligraphy, as this term, its connotation and extension, occupies so central a place in calligraphic practice and creation. What is *gu*, or what exactly do calligraphers of successive dynasties learn? At different points, the above passages used “tradition”, “antiquity” and “past” to translate this Chinese term, and the subtle differences between these three translations are conducive to understanding it. As far as the whole of Chinese calligraphy history is concerned, one can use *gu* to summarise the two traditions or two schools discussed in Chapter One: *tiexue* 帖學 (copybook school) and *beixue* 碑學 (stele school).<sup>19</sup> *Tiexue*, or the “classical tradition” as Lothar Ledderose called it, based itself on *tie* (label, note, handwritten pieces of informal content), and reigned between the Six Dynasties period (222-589) and the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> *Beixue*, or the school based on *bei* (stone inscriptions), in defiance of the copybook school values, gradually established its identity in the eighteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Although there are many contentious issues surround these two schools, scholars tend to arrive at agreement about their distinct studying models. As Japanese art historian Yujiro Nakata summarised:

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<sup>19</sup> The first chapter of the thesis discussed these two schools in the section on stone inscriptions.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion of *bei* and *tie*, and the origin and the establishment of the classical tradition, see Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition and Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 7-44.

<sup>21</sup> It is generally believed that Ruan Yuan's two treatises – *Nanbei shupai lun* 南北書派論 (On the Southern and Northern Schools of Calligraphy, 1814) and *Beibei nantie lun* 北碑南帖論 (On the Northern Stele and Southern Copybook, 1819) – constitute the rationale for the rise of the stele school after the middle Qing Dynasty. See Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 629-637.

The copybook school took the work of the two Wangs and Zhong Yao printed in copybooks and albums such as the “Chunhua Pavilion Copybook” as its main subject of study. Included under this heading were those who followed the traditions of Mi Fu, Zhao Mengfu, Dong Qichang, and others who inherited the tradition of the Jin masters. The stele school, on the other hand, took its direction from studies of the stone carving dating from the Han through the Wei and Northern Dynasties.<sup>22</sup>

Within these two schools, *gu* thus has different references. The copybook school and the stele school use different antiquities as their subject of study, the former handwritten pieces and the latter stone or earlier bronze inscriptions. In calligraphic practice, learning from *gu*, or from antiquity, one comes across immediately issues of materiality as posed by these two traditions. For students of calligraphy, this is an important factor because different studying models actually mean different styles.

*Gu* as tradition implies the fact that calligraphic practice in China has long-established methods and conventions. As mentioned above, the classical copybook tradition lasted for one and a half millennia, spanning several dynasties. In this sense, *gu* seems to represent a stable and unchangeable mode calligraphers of various dynasties would follow. In calligraphy criticism, however, in fact the term *gu* more often tended to denote master calligraphers and their works from a recent past. In the above example of Wei Shuo’s *Bi zhen tu*, Wei had in her mind calligraphers such as Cai Yong 蔡邕 (132-192), a calligrapher not far removed from her time. Another example is from the famous mid-Tang dynasty calligrapher Yan Zhenqing 顏真卿 (709-785). Rather than learning from more ancient masters in the Han and Wei periods, Yan took Chu Suiliang 褚遂良 (596-658) and Zhang Xu 張旭 (675-759) as his teachers. Chu Suiliang, the early Tang calligrapher who claimed to be a follower of the classical Wang tradition, became an immediate past worth learning for Yan Zhenqing in the eighth century. After about three hundred years, Yan’s own calligraphic works became the

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<sup>22</sup> Nakata, Yujiro; Jeffrey Hunter, trans. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New York and Tokyo: John Weatherhill, 1983. 150.

recent past canons for a group of Northern Song literati calligraphers like Ouyang Xun, Su Shi, and Huang Tingjian. *Gu*, in this sense, is an ever-changing and accumulative repertoire in Chinese calligraphy history. A calligrapher who learns from a certain master from a past age may become the subject of learning for another calligrapher in a subsequent time.

The next issue is how Chinese people learn from the past in calligraphic practice. Theoretical literature on calligraphy abounds in technical terms which refer to various kinds of practical approaches, and they can be generalised by the two most frequently mentioned terms: *linmo* 臨摹 and *dutie* 讀帖. Although *linmo* could be readily translated as “copy”, this combined term actually denotes two types of copying methods where *mo* means “exact copy” and *lin* “free copy or tracing”. The meanings and differences between these two characters are clearly explained by the Song dynasty critic Huang Bosi 黃伯思 (1079-1118):

世人多不曉臨摹之別，臨，謂以紙在古帖旁觀其形勢而學之……摹，謂以薄紙覆古帖上隨其細大而拓之。<sup>23</sup>

Most people don't recognise the distinction between *lin* and *mo*. *Lin* means that [the copyist] places the paper at the side of the original work, observing its forms and forces, and emulates it...*Mo* means that [the copyist] places a thin paper on top of the original work whose formal variations are exactly copied.

There is no ambiguity concerning the technique of *mo* or exact copy, in which the practitioner follows exactly the linear movement of the copybook. Exact copying is believed to be helpful for beginners who need to learn to control the hand. The method of *lin*, compared to the rigid *mo*, is more flexible and allows degrees of faithfulness. As Ledderose pointed out, “on the one end of the spectrum are the works in which the

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<sup>23</sup> Huang, Bosi. *Dongguan yulun* 東觀餘論 (Remaining Discussion on Imperial Repository of Books). In Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 1. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1993. 862.

copyist – although writing freely – still tries to follow the model closely. On the other end are free creations ‘in the spirit of,’ that shares no more with the model than a vaguely defined aesthetic mood.”<sup>24</sup> The spectrum of faithfulness innate in the method of *lin* implicitly reveals that calligraphers in China do not maintain a unified attitude towards the past, and provides the space for individual calligraphic exploration.

Another important practical method to learn from the past is *duitie*, literally meaning “reading the master’s original work”. “Reading” here is used in a metaphorical sense; just as one needs to comprehend the words’ meanings or analyse the compositional structures to understand a piece of writing, one also must closely “read” the brushstrokes and the variations of the ink colours in order to grasp the beauty of the forms and the intentions behind the calligraphic structures. If *linmo* highlights the action of the hand on the part of a calligrapher, *duitie* emphasises the calligraphers’ comparatively placid contemplation.

In Western Europe, studying a master’s works often constitutes a part of training curriculum in the academies. André Félibien (1619-1695), a French chronicler of art, while discussing the Academy painting training, mentioned that “to instruct Youth in the Art of Painting, it would be necessary to shew them the Works of the greatest Painters.”<sup>25</sup> A century later, in a proposal to reform the teaching programme in the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, Quatremère de Quincy (1755-1849) divided the main body of art teaching into five types of study, one of which is the study of Antiquity.<sup>26</sup> As one can imagine a group of Academy members huddled together to study closely the works of Raphael and Titian, it’s not hard to envision Chinese disciples of calligraphy, if obtaining a rubbing of the two Wangs, reading and studying it over and over again. Although artistic training in both the West and China attaches importance to closely analysing and contemplating the good works of the past, Chinese visual art theories put more emphasis on the combination of contemplating and copying

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<sup>24</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition and Chinese Calligraphy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

<sup>25</sup> Harrison, Charles, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger, eds. *Art in Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. 109.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 714-16.

the past, on how contemplation would enhance the copy. With regard to the two terms – *linmo* (copy) and *dutie* (read and contemplate), many remarks in calligraphy criticism bring to notice the linkage between the two. A note by the Song dynasty scholar-critic Jiang Kui 姜夔 (1155-1221) is fairly representative:

皆須是古人名筆，置之幾案，懸之座右，朝夕諦觀，思其用筆之理，然後可以摹臨。<sup>27</sup>

It is imperative to place famous pieces of calligraphy by ancient masters on the desk and hang them to the right of the seat, to contemplate them all day long, pondering the principles of their brushstrokes. After that has been done, one is ready to trace or to copy.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.4 *Tong-bian* 通變 (continuity-mutation)

Although calligraphic practice, as well as criticism, features the past and copying the past, for Chinese calligraphers it is by no means their ultimate goal to be followers of previous masters. The body of Western theory mentioned above has emphasised that attention to the past is always directed to the present literary or artistic creation. Or, to put it in another way, one looks back to the past to create something new. This is mirrored in Chinese calligraphic art, within which a considerable anxiety of the calligraphers is the fear that they would be called a *shu nu* 書奴 or “slave writer”. To a great extent, such an anxiety is caused by the normative role of the past and the modes of training in this art. This anxiety of creativity or originality, as the American Sinologist Frederick W. Mote pointed out, has its root in an apparent anomaly in Chinese civilisation, in which “the defining criteria for value were inescapably

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<sup>27</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 249.

<sup>28</sup> Translation cited from Chang, Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 25.

governed by past models, not by present experience or by future ideal states of existence”, in which “the Chinese past had to become greater than the Chinese present in order for the accumulated wisdom of human civilisation to impose its guiding function, to keep the all-important present on the track.”<sup>29</sup>

The immediate question is how Chinese calligraphers could achieve freedom and create novelty within a powerful “Great Tradition”. The answer lies in the above discussion of *gu*, the methods of learning from the past, as nothing else but the proper past acquires competitive validity, as for a man who intends to deviate from the past he will find that “the same human intelligence that has allowed man to achieve the proper in the past also guided his discriminating mind in judging the present to be deviant.”<sup>30</sup> As to the field of calligraphy, the calligraphic canons and the training model dominated by copying such canons provide writers the essential skills to be a calligrapher. And it is believed that long-lasting copying practice and complete mastery of pre-existing skill repertoire, on the part of a calligraphy practitioner, will lead to newness and innovation. As Chinese art historian Jerome Silbergeld wrote:

In calligraphy, one trained by repetitive imitation until every twist and turn of the brush, every motion of the model, was mastered, felt comfortable and natural, and then spontaneity could begin to emerge and imitation could turn to emulation. Such was the irony, the inner tension of the calligraphic practice: one gave up freedom in order to attain freedom.<sup>31</sup>

Silbergeld’s insight into the nature of calligraphic practice touches on a distinctive Chinese outlook on art history – *tong-bian* 通變 (continuity-mutation). The combined term first occurred as two key technical concepts in the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) from the Western Zhou period (1100-771 BC), describing the correlation or the

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<sup>29</sup> Mote, Frederick W. “The Arts and the ‘Theorizing Mode’ of the Civilization.” In Murck, Christian F., ed. *Artists and Traditions: Uses of the Past in Chinese Culture*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1976. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>31</sup> Silbergeld, Jerome. “Calligraphy, Sculpture, and Painting are One, But Sometimes Two or Three.” In Fong, Wen. *Art as History: Calligraphy and Painting as One*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014. 5.



continuity through change within the world's myriad things.<sup>32</sup> *Tong-bian* philosophy had permeated art criticism by the end of the fifth century AD, a notable example being the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter of Liu Xie's *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons). Titled as *tong-bian*, Liu's chapter presents the fluid relations between the two terms. As Stephen Owen observed, "at times we have 'continuity versus mutation'; at times we have 'achieving continuity by mutation'; at times we have 'carrying through (*tong*) mutation'."<sup>33</sup>

Conceptions of *tong-bian* also appeared in calligraphic commentaries of Liu Xie's time, such as Yu Jianwu's 庾肩吾 (487-551) *Shu pin* 書品 (Gradings of Calligraphers). Commenting on the Southern Liang (502-557) calligrapher Ruan Yan 阮研, Yu said that Ruan created his own style after grasping the excellence of preceding masterpieces and learning from the masters like Wang Xizhi and Zong You.<sup>34</sup> The *tong-bian* philosophy later established itself in Tang calligraphic discourses theories<sup>35</sup>; a short note from the late Tang calligrapher Monk Yaqi 釋亞棲 is representative of this continuity-innovation conception of calligraphic history:

凡書通即變。王變白雲體，歐變右軍體，柳變歐陽體，永禪師、褚遂良、顏真卿、李邕、虞世南等，並得書中法，后皆自變其體，以傳後世，俱得垂名。若執法不變，縱能入石三分，亦被號為書奴，終非自立之體。是書家之大要。<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of *tong-bian* philosophy in the *Book of Changes*, see Tian, Chenshan. "Tongbian: A Chinese Strand of Thought." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 27.4 (2000): 441-468.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 224.

<sup>34</sup> Yu Jianwu's original comment on Ruan Yan is: 阮研居今觀古，盡窺眾妙之門，雖復師王祖鍾，終成別構一體。See Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 88.

<sup>35</sup> There is not much research on the theory of *tong-bian* in Chinese calligraphy criticism. For a collection of commentaries that could fall under *tong-bian* philosophy, see Zhu, Tianshu. "Zhongguo gudai shufa chuanguozuo zhong de tongbian guannian" 中國古代書法創作中的“通變”觀念 (The Concept of *Tongbian* in Ancient Chinese Calligraphic Creation). In Sun, Xiaoyun, and Xue Longchun, eds. *Qing xun qi ben: Gudai shufa chuanguozuo yanjiu guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* 請循其本：古代書法創作研究國際學術討論會論文集 (Please Return to the Basics: Proceedings of the International Conference on Ancient Chinese Calligraphic Creation). Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2010. 483-97.

<sup>36</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 297-298.

All calligraphic writing after achieving continuity [of the past] will change. Wang [Xizhi] changed Baiyun's style; Ouyang [Xun] changed Wang's style; Liu [Gongquan] changed Ouyang's style; the Buddhist monk Zhi Yong, Chu Suiliang, Yan Zhenqing, Li Yong, Yu Shinan, etc., all [of them] acquired the methods of the calligraphic writing and then changed their own style, thus [their works were] transmitted to the future generations and earned their fame. He who sticks to the method and doesn't change, even if his writing is forceful, will still be called a "slave-writer"; after all, he doesn't create a style of his own. This is important for calligraphers.

Spontaneity and emulation, in the sense described by Silbergeld, won't happen naturally while copying the past; achieving continuity won't necessarily lead to change. Change or originality is in the first place a creative faculty appearing as a subjective choice. In the above commentary, all the calligraphers mentioned by the Monk Yaqi are creative masters who created their own style, hence their being recorded in calligraphic history. However, Yaqi's key point is probably more directed as a practical-guide for all who practise this art: calligraphers should break through the tradition.

After the Tang dynasty, an emphasis on creativity or originality manifests in calligraphy criticism. Calligraphic critics as well as calligraphers use a variety of terms and phrases to frame the concept of originality. In the Song dynasty, terms like *zi cheng jia* 自成家 (developed one's own style), *xin yi* 新意 (new meanings or ideas) and *bian tai* 變態 (change or transformation) frequently appeared in the notes and remarks on calligraphy by the famous scholar-officials like Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072), Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105), and Mi Fu 米芾 (1051-1107). Advocating innovation in calligraphic practice, the last three of the four became famous calligraphers who established their own idiosyncratic styles.<sup>37</sup> Yuan

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the innovation-oriented strand in Northern Song calligraphy criticism, see Egan, Ronald. "Ou-Yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 365-419; Egan, Ronald. *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994. 261-281.

dynasty calligraphic discourses, though advocating the study of the masterworks of earlier calligraphers, also emphasised the importance of change in calligraphic creation. The Yuan scholars Zheng Shao 鄭杓 (fl. 1289) and Liu Youding 劉有定 (fl. 1289), for example, while discussing the proper methods for using the brush, critically discussed terms like *chang* 常 (convention; alignment with the past) and *bian* 變 (change or transformation).<sup>38</sup> Theorists in the Ming and Qing dynasties, apart from using the above-mentioned terms to denote originality, especially favoured the term *qi* 奇 (the strange and unusual), a term that has already attracted the attentions of some Chinese art historians in the West.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

Chinese calligraphic practice, or visual art practice at large, emphasises the study of the past, an inheritance of tradition, but this doesn't deny the fact that creativity or originality is a value embedded in Chinese aesthetics. Calligraphy criticism in China has a variety of terms denoting the concept of creativity. The term *tong-bian*, or *bian-tong* in its reverse form, tells us a lot about the core of calligraphic creation and its history. Contemporary scholar Chenshan Tian translated *tong-bian* as “continuity through change”, however, when used in calligraphy criticism, it can also be rendered as “change through continuity”. The former translation highlights that the continuity of calligraphy history lies in the creativity of calligraphers of the successive dynasties, of the present, while the latter reiterates any creation or innovation in this art lies in the study of – and the reverence for – the past. *Tong-bian* is similar to a lot of polarities that can be found in Chinese philosophy and art criticism, such as yin-yang (陰陽), black-white (*hei-bai* 黑白) and past-present (*gu-jin* 古今), and the distinguishing feature of

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<sup>38</sup> Zheng, Shao, and Liu Youding. *Yanji bingzhu* 衍極并註 (*Yanji and Its Connotations*). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Yuandai shuhua lun* 元代書畫論 (Yuan Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy and Painting). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002. 230-231.

<sup>39</sup> For discussions of the term *qi* in Ming dynasty calligraphy criticism, see Ching, Dora C. Y. “The Aesthetics of the Unusual and the Strange in Seventeenth-Century Calligraphy.” In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 343-359; Burnett, Katharine P. *Dimensions of Originality: Essays on Seventeenth-Century Chinese Art Theory and Criticism*. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2013. 167-200.

these pairings, according to David Hall and Roger Ames , is “that each pole can only be explained by reference to the other.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, having discussed the role of the past, this thesis now turns to theories concerning creation and creative process in Chinese calligraphy criticism.

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<sup>40</sup> Hall, David L., and Roger T. Ames. *Thinking through Confucius*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987. 19.

## Chapter 4

### Mind and Hand Acting in Harmony

(*xin shou shuang chang* 心手雙暢)

In my discussions of calligraphic genres in Chapter 1 and calligraphic force-form in Chapter 2, I touched on some aspects of calligraphic creation. To structure an aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy, it is crucial to examine further the creative process and creativity of this art. Creativity, as Philip Alperson pointed out, “seems at least a hallmark or a characteristic feature of art generally. And so we think of artists as creating their works, we think of work of art...as artistic creations.”<sup>1</sup>

Two theoreticians’ understanding of the artistic creativity has influenced my reflection on calligraphic creation. The first one is Monroe Beardsley, who understood the artistic creative process as the “stretch of mental and physical activity between the incept and the final touch – between the thought “I may be on to something here” and the thought “it is finished.””<sup>2</sup> The second is Yu-kung Kao, a scholar of Chinese literature, who, in a seminal article on Chinese lyrical tradition, wrote that “a lyrical artist is one for whom creativity is the expression of one’s internal mental states through the structuring of symbols.”<sup>3</sup> For Kao, the principles of lyric aesthetics underlie the creative process of all the major art forms in early China – music, verse, calligraphy, and painting. To be precise, the creation of all early Chinese artistic products, according to Kao, undergoes two phases – internalisation and symbolisation, where the former means “the process of incorporating external data” and the latter “the use of symbols as artistic expression.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alperson, Philip. “Creativity in Art”. In Levinson, Jerrold, ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Beardsley, Monroe C. “On the Creation of Art”. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23.3 (1965): 291.

<sup>3</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”. In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 47, 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Beardsley's and Kao's understandings of the creative process share certain similarities. They both prescribed a limit to the "process" of artistic creation, and both hinted at two key aspects during such a process – the artist's mental and physical activities. Inspired by these two authors, this chapter focuses on two vital elements of calligraphic creation: first, the role of *xin* 心 (mind) and the related mental or psychological states; second, the somatic movements in the execution or materialisation of calligraphic works. I hold that the creation of Chinese calligraphy should be understood as a psychosomatic process, and hence Chinese calligraphic works should be seen as traces of mind and body. But before studying Chinese texts on calligraphic creation, the first section of the chapter explains a "tripartite structure" of artistic creative process, which might be applicable across the arts of various cultures.

#### 4.1 A tripartite scheme

It is not hard to find – in the aesthetic theories or art criticism of various cultural traditions like continental European, Anglo-American, and Chinese – a comparable pattern of discourse on artistic creative process, which can be roughly summarised by the tripartite scheme "world – artist (creative mind) – work of art". In most cases, this tripartite scheme is not explicitly proposed in Western writing on aesthetics. Close reading of sections on art creation, however, can frequently capture the traces of such a scheme. In Hegel's *Aesthetics*, for example, one comes across the following description of the creative activity in art:

In the *first* place this creative activity involves the gift and the sense for grasping reality and its configurations which, attentively heard or seen, impress on the spirit the greatest multiplicity of pictures of what is *there*...This gift and this interest in a specific grasp of the actual world in its real shape...is thus the *first* requirement of an artist. On the other hand, bound up with precise knowledge of the external form there must be equal familiarity with man's inner life, with

the passion of his heart, and all the aims of human soul. To this double knowledge there must be added an acquaintance with the way in which the inner life of the spirit expresses itself in the real world and shines through the externality thereof.<sup>5</sup>

Hegel's aesthetics holds that "the work of art springs from the spirit", and hence emphasises the subjective productive activity or the imagination of the artist<sup>6</sup>; the artist's creative subjectivity here occupies a central place. But Hegel also pointed out that, as shown in the above excerpt, the artist's imagination should assimilate external and internal reality. And as a next phase, an artist should find a way to present the merging of the external and inner reality that remains in the imagination into a work of art. Along this course of action, the Ideal, as Hegel understood it, was represented by a work of art.

The phase of art making, or execution, was only hinted at in Hegel's discussion of artistic creative activities, partly because of his emphasis on artists' mental activities. In the aesthetic writing of a few Anglo-American philosophers in the twentieth century, one can find like emphasis on the psychological aspects of the creation of art. The English philosopher R. G. Collingwood, for example, claims that "a work of art need not be what we should call a real thing...a work of art may be completely created when it has been created in the artist's mind."<sup>7</sup> Although Collingwood realised that making an artefact means making a real artefact and that this activity consists of two stages – "(1) Making the plan, which is creating" and "(2) Imposing the plan on certain matter"<sup>8</sup>, he made it clear that the actual making of any kind of work of art is "something that goes on in his head" and the second stage is just fabricating.<sup>9</sup>

Collingwood's contemporary, American philosopher John Dewey, perceived in the aesthetic inquiries of his day a rupture between works of art and the human conditions.

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<sup>5</sup> Hegel, G. W. F.; T. M. Knox, trans. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. 281-282.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>7</sup> Collingwood, R. G. *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958. 130.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 134.

As Dewey pointed out in the second paragraph of his *Art as Experience*:

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance... Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort.<sup>10</sup>

As the title of his magnum opus suggests, Dewey proposed that works of art are “the refined and intensified forms of experience”, and such an experience is “the result, the sign, and the reward of that interaction of organism and environment.”<sup>11</sup> And for Dewey, the primary task is to knot together the everyday events, human experience, and work of art. As an artwork is nothing more than one kind of human experience transformed into another kind, Dewey naturally had to explicate how an artist’s experience came into being while interacting with some aspects of the world, the quality of the entire experience, and the process of making art. Crediting the artist with the pivotal role in art creation, Dewey emphasised both the artist’s observation of the world and the ability to transform the perceptual phase of experience into an external embodiment or a real artwork. “An artist”, as Dewey wrote, “is one who is not only especially gifted in powers of execution but in unusual sensitivity to the qualities of things.”<sup>12</sup>

Linking the various factors that involve artistic creation together, Dewey’s aesthetic theory epitomises the above-mentioned tripartite scheme of “world – artist (creative mind) – work of art”, and to some degree is easily understandable to a Chinese aesthetic mind. As a counterpart, this chapter selects a few key texts on various genres of Chinese art to discuss the traditional Chinese conception of artistic creation.

In China, music was the first art form to be discussed in terms that are recognised

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<sup>10</sup> Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1934. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.



today as aesthetic philosophy. No later than the end of Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-9 AD), a theory of music emerged. Widely believed to be the first monograph on music, *Yue ji* 樂記 (Record of Music) described the nature and the creation of music as follows:

凡音之起，由人心生也。人心之動，物使之然也。感於物而動，故形於聲。聲相應，故生變，變成方，謂之音……<sup>13</sup>

In all cases, the arising of music (*yin*) is born in the hearts (*xin*) of men. The movement of men's hearts is made so by [external] things. They are touched off by things and move, thus they take shape in [human] sound (*sheng*). Sounds respond to each other, and thus give birth to change. Change forms a pattern, and this is called music (*yin*)...<sup>14</sup>

Relating the nature of music to the human heart or mind is certainly not a feature peculiar to Chinese aesthetics. In Collingwood's art theory, for instance, he repeatedly noted that the creation of music goes on in the head of the prospective composer.<sup>15</sup> To Chinese aestheticians, however, the more important point the above passage illustrates is that it established an early prototype of "*xin* (heart-mind) – *wu* (external things) interaction".<sup>16</sup> Scott Cook's comment on this passage is conducive to a general understanding of this interaction, as well as the successive stages in music creation:

The idea here is that of man's response, in musical terms, to external phenomena – the way in which he does so is a matter of hierarchical sequence, in which the response goes through several stages before it reached completion. Man's first

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<sup>13</sup> Ji, Lian kang. *Yueji yizhu* 樂記譯注 (Yueji: Annotation and Translation). Beijing: Yinyue chubanshe, 1958. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Translation cited from Cook, Scott. " 'Yue Ji', Record of Music, Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary." *Asian Music* 26.2 (1995): 24-25, 27

<sup>15</sup> In the chapter that discusses the role of imagination in art, Collingwood wrote that "The actual making of the tune is something that goes on in his head, and nowhere else... The actual making of the tune is therefore alternatively called the making of an imaginary tune." Collingwood, R. G. *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958. 134.

<sup>16</sup> Ji, Lian kang. *Yueji yizhu* 樂記譯注 (Yueji: Annotation and Translation). Beijing: Yinyue chubanshe, 1958. II.

reaction is purely an internal one; his heart is moved by some external phenomenon, and at this point it is only a matter for his self-consciousness. Yet it is taken for granted (thus *gu* 故) that this reaction will be given external expression, in the form of *sheng* (sound) – a product of the interplay between the internal and the external. Once given external form in *sheng*, these creations now respond to each other...giving rise to change and forming patterns. Once patterns have formed, this is called *yin*.<sup>17</sup>

Both Collingwood's art theory and the Chinese *Yue ji* emphasise that music arises from the subjective. However, revealing the several stages of music creation, the above excerpt from *Yue ji* starts where Collingwood stops; the latter claimed that the making of a tune is the making of an imaginary tune<sup>18</sup>, while the former tries to explain how this imaginary tune came into being and is externalised. As Cook's comment indicates, *Yue ji* attempted to explain these two aspects of creation. The imaginary tune is the result of the *xin-wu* reaction, and the externalisation of the imaginary tune is realised by the medium of *sheng* (sound). *Yue ji*'s discussion of the creative stages in music pioneers and epitomises a typical Chinese aesthetic thinking of artistic creation, which credits the mind (*xin* 心) of the prospective artist with a pivotal role, and relates it to the natural world on one hand, and to physical execution or symbolisation on the other.

Such a tripartite structure is more clearly presented in early Chinese literary criticism, such as Lu Ji's 陸機 (261-303) *Wen fu* 文賦 (The Poetic Exposition on Literature) and Liu Xie's 劉勰 (465-522) *Wenxin diaolong* 文心雕龍 (The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons). The preface to Lu Ji's *Wen fu*, for instance, reflects on the creative act in literature:

每自屬文，尤見其情，恒患意不稱物，文不逮意。<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Cook, Scott. "Yue Ji", Record of Music, Introduction, Translation, Notes, and Commentary." *Asian Music* 26.2 (1995): 27.

<sup>18</sup> Collingwood, R. G. *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958. 134.

<sup>19</sup> Lu, Ji; Zhang Shaokang, comm. *Wen fu jishi* 文賦集釋 (Annotated Edition of *Wen Fu*). Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 2002. 1.

And whenever I myself compose a literary piece, I perceive full well their state of mind (or “the situation,” *qing*). I constantly fear failure in my conceptions’ (*yi*) not being equal to the things of the world (*wu*), and in my writing’s (*wen*) not being equal to my conceptions.<sup>20</sup>

The tripartite structure here is that of “*wu* 物 (things of the world) – *yi* 意 (conceptions) – *wen* 文 (writing).” As Stephen Owen summarised, Lu understands the literary creative process as “a transformation from the ‘external,’ *wai* 外 (‘things of the world’) to the ‘internal,’ *nei* 內 (‘conception’), then again to the ‘external’ (‘writing’).”<sup>21</sup> But besides these three terms, and the creative stages harboured in their relations, this passage is more concerned with, or Lu Ji is anxious about, “the questions of fullness, diminution in expression, and degrees of adequacy”, a central issue in traditional Chinese literary theories of literary manifestation.<sup>22</sup> This literary tripartite structure consists of two literary creative stages or two groups of relations – from *wu* (the outside world) to *yi* (subjective conceptions), and then *yi* to *wen* (writing); Lu’s anxiety originates in the impossibility of the perfect realisation of each of the two processes.

This tripartite structure of *wu-yi-wen*, along with the problem of inequality between subjective conceptions and the things in the world, including the concern that writing does not completely embody the conceptions it aims to, resonates in Chinese calligraphy criticism. As the Tang dynasty calligraphy theorist Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (act. 713-741) put it at the beginning of *Liuti shulun* 六體書論 (A Treatise on Six Scripts):

臣問形見曰象，書者法象也。心不能妙探于物，墨不能曲盡于心。<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 80.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 212.

I have heard that the manifestation of shape [in the mind] is called *xiang* (image or emblematic symbols); to practise calligraphy is to emulate *xiang*. The mind cannot delve into the most subtle of the things in the world, and the ink cannot express the subtlety of the mind tactfully and finely.

This excerpt raises two points concerning calligraphic creation. First, according to Zhang, creative calligraphers emulate the images of the things in the world. Second, there exists, as with musical and literary creation, a tripartite scheme of “*wu* (things in the world) – *xin* (mind) – *mo* (ink or brushwork)” in practising calligraphy. The first point, in fact, was elaborated in many pre-Tang commentaries on calligraphy. For example, in *Bi lun* 筆論 (A discourse on brushwork), a work attributed to Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192), it is written that “writing of various scripts should enter into the shapes or forms of external things (為書之體，許入其形)”. Following this, as discussed in Chapter Two, Cai enumerated a series of possible forms in the natural world, like that of sitting and walking, crouching and rising, bow and arrow, and cloud and mist.

How should one understand that Chinese calligraphy emulates the shapes and forms in the natural world? After all, calligraphic creation, unlike painting, does not aim at pictorial representation of external objects. Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976) proposed an “animistic principle” to address this question:

Chinese calligraphy has explored every possible style of rhythm and form, and it has done so by deriving its artistic inspiration from nature, especially from plants and animals – the branches of the plum flower, a dried vine with a few hanging leaves, the springing body of the leopard... There is thus not one type of rhythm in nature that has not been copied in Chinese writing and formed directly or indirectly the inspiration for a particular “style.” If a Chinese scholar sees a certain beauty in a dry vine with its careless grace and elastic strength, the tip of the end curling upward and a few leaves still hanging on it haphazardly

and yet most appropriately, he tries to incorporate that into his writing.<sup>24</sup>

According to Lin, things in the natural world do not enter into calligraphic works as perceivable visual images; their postures or gestures, their rhythm and abstract linear forms inspire prospective calligraphers who then employ particular brushstrokes to emulate the image in their mind. The term *xiang* 象 (image), as mentioned in Zhang Huaiguan's treatise, is a key word here, as it could be understood as the mental imagery that results from the fusion of the forms of external objects and the subjective process. A concern of the early aestheticians was whether the mind can capture the utmost subtleties of the things in the world. That is, can the brush and ink accurately express the mind? As Lu Ji in his "Poetic Exposition on Literature", Zhang was clearly conscious of the limitation of our perceptual capability of the things in the world, and the difference between intent and execution.

As a last example, I turn to the writing concerning the creation of Chinese painting. Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, the eminent late Tang dynasty art historian, related in his *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Record of Famous Painters through the Ages) the following story:

初，畢庶子宏擅名于代。一見驚嘆之。異其惟用秃毫或以手摸絹素。因問  
璪所受。璪曰，外師造化，中得心源。<sup>25</sup>

Earlier, the Senior President of the Crown Prince's Grand Secretariat, Bi Hong [8<sup>th</sup> century], was the period's most famous [painter]. Once he had seen [Zhang Zao's painting], he exclaimed in astonishment. He marvelled that Zao used only blunt brushes, or else rubbed the silk with his hands, hence he asked from whom Zao had learned [his techniques]. Zao replied: "Externally all Creation is my

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<sup>24</sup> Lin, Yutang. *My Country and My People*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935. 293.

<sup>25</sup> Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 1. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1993. 156.

master. Internally I have found the mind's sources.”<sup>26</sup>

Zhang Zao's reply has long been regarded as a maxim for Chinese painters, and it is probably one of the most famous propositions in Chinese aesthetics. Although there is still contention about the precise meaning of Zhang's statement, hence the uncertainty of the English translation, it is generally agreed that Zhang succinctly summarised how mental imagery comes into being before being externalised by the prospective painter.<sup>27</sup> To be precise, the mental imagery of a Chinese painter originates in the interaction between the things in the world and the painter's mind. The third part of the tripartite structure, that of physical execution and the subsequent artwork, is not mentioned in Zhang's maxim. But apparently, this phase of execution immediately follows the creation of the mental imagery. Zheng Xie 鄭燮 (1693-1765), an eighteenth-century painter, once summed up his experience of painting bamboo into three stages: the bamboo in the eyes, the bamboo in the mind, and the bamboo in the hand.<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.2 Conditions for creation

I want to start with the circumstances surrounding Chinese calligraphic creation before dealing with calligrapher's psychological and physical aspects. An artist makes or creates a work at a given time, with kinds of materials, and in a certain mental state. All of these conditions that are specific to a creative act, according to the criticism of various Chinese arts, exert influence on artistic creation and hence the final work – more so than most Western theories propose. They constitute an uncertain factor in explaining calligraphic creativity, an element that involves, what Beardsley termed, the “incept and final touch” of an artwork.

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<sup>26</sup> Bush, Susan, and Hsio-Yen Shih, comps. and eds. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 65.

<sup>27</sup> For an in-depth discussion of Zhang Zao's statement, see Ye, Lang. *Zhongguo meixueshi dagang* 中國美學史大綱 (An Outline of the History of Chinese Aesthetics). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1985. 249-252.

<sup>28</sup> Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編 (Classified Collection of Historical Texts on Chinese Painting). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998. 1179.

In his pivotal work *Wenxin diaolong*, Liu Xie frequently referred to *hui* 會 (occasion) and *shu* 數 (chance) while discussing literary creation. These two terms, according to Yu-Kung Kao, should be understood as “variables which give the same personal style different faces and sometimes even cause a drastic reversal.”<sup>29</sup> Calligraphy criticism rarely discusses *hui* and *shu* as they appear in literary texts, but apparently Chinese calligraphers are also well aware of the *shi* 時 (an opportune time or occasion) of a particular calligraphic activity. The most detailed description of the circumstances that influence calligraphy creation is provided by Sun Guoting’s 孫過庭 (646-691) *Shu pu* 書譜 (Treatise on Calligraphy):

又一時而書有乖有合，合則流媚，乖則彫疎，略言其由，各有其五：神怡務閑，一合也；感惠徇知，二合也；時和氣潤，三合也；紙墨相發，四合也；偶然欲書，五合也。心遽體留，一乖也；意違勢屈，二乖也；風燥日炎，三乖也；紙墨不稱，四乖也；情怠手闌，五乖也。乖合之際，優劣互差。得時不如得器，得器不如得志。若五乖同萃，思遏手蒙；五合交臻，神融筆暢。<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore, because one writes at a given time, circumstances will provide either discord or harmony. When there is harmony, the writing flows forth charmingly; when there is discord, it fades and scatters. To put it simply, there are five reasons for this. Being happy in spirit and free from other duties is the first harmony. Having a feeling favourable to quick apprehension is the second. Genial weather with the right amount of moisture in the air is the third harmony. A perfect match between paper and ink is the fourth harmony. A sudden, unsolicited desire to write is the fifth harmony. But a restless mind and a sluggish body constitute the first discord. An opposed will and constricted

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<sup>29</sup> Kao, Yu-kung. “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”. In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 68.

<sup>30</sup> Zhu, Jianxin, comm. *Sun Guoting shu pu jian zheng* 孫過庭書譜箋證 (An Annotated Edition of Sun Guoting’s *Shu Pu*). Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1963. 44.

energy constitute the second discord. Dry wind and a hot sun constitute the third discord. A poor match between paper and ink constitutes the fourth discord. Exhausted emotions and a tired hand constitute the fifth discord. The distinction between discord and harmony is the difference between good and bad calligraphy. Getting the right moment is not as valuable as obtaining the right tools; obtaining the right tools is not as valuable as gaining one's will. When the five discords coincide, the mind is blocked and the hand is checked. When the five harmonies concur, the spirit issues forth freely, and the brush moves with ease.<sup>31</sup>

From a perspective of pure artistic creation, Sun Guoting summarised five pairs of factors that will eventually determine the success or failure of a calligraphic act. These five factors boil down to three aspects: *shi* 時 (right time), *qi* 器 (tools) and *zhi* 志 (mental disposition, will, or state of mind).<sup>32</sup> To be more precise, the third harmony and discord are concerned with *shi*, the fourth harmony and discord with *qi*, and all the rest with *zhi*. According to Sun, these three aspects are not of equal importance: *shi* is less important than *qi* and *zhi* is the most important of all.

Natural circumstances, the climate or *shi* mentioned in *Shu pu*, is not a factor that has often been discussed in other treatises on calligraphy. However, while discussing famous pieces of calligraphic works like Wang Xizhi's *Lanting xu* 蘭亭序 (Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Collection), we tend to mention the climate when Wang created this masterpiece – “the day was fine, the air clear, and a gentle breeze regaled us” (天朗氣清，惠風和暢).<sup>33</sup> It is difficult to evaluate how and to what degree the natural conditions (such as the climate) influence calligraphic creation. The creative act *per se* won't be hindered by the climate; it is the creative subject who will probably be

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<sup>31</sup> Translation based on two versions with modifications: Chang, Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 7; Laurentis, Pietro. *The Manual of Calligraphy by Sun Guoting of the Tang: A Comprehensive Study of the Manuscript and Its Author*. Napoli: Università degli studi di Napoli “L'orientale”, 2011. 49-50.

<sup>32</sup> In Chang's translation, *zhi* is rendered as the “mental disposition”, while in Laurentis's, as the “will”.

<sup>33</sup> Translation cited from Minford, John, and Joseph S. M. Lau, eds. *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*. Hong Kong and New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. 480.



stimulated or upset. And in this sense, favourable natural circumstances bring calligraphers positive states of mind that are conducive to calligraphic creation. Northern Song calligrapher Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105) once talked of the positive role of the natural conditions in his calligraphic practice:

余寓居開元寺之怡思堂，坐見江山，每於此中作草，似得江山之助。<sup>34</sup>

Lodging in the Hall of *Yisi* of Kaiyuan Temple, I can behold the rivers and mountains. Whenever I do cursive script there, I feel [that my calligraphy was] favoured by the rivers and mountains.

Compared to the natural circumstances, the tools, mainly brush, ink and paper, are more important factors, as they are directly involved in calligraphic creation. Calligraphers often consciously choose the appropriate tools based on the script they will employ and the literary content of the work. The size and hardness of the brush, the dryness of the ink, the water-absorbing capacity of the paper, all matter in calligraphic creation. As Jiang Kui 姜夔 (1155-1221), a Southern Song calligrapher and critic, wrote in his *Xu shu pu* 續書譜 (Sequel to the “Treatise on Calligraphy”):

凡作楷，墨欲乾，然不可太燥。行草則潤燥相雜，以潤取妍，以燥取險。墨濃則筆滯，燥則筆枯，亦不可不知也。筆欲鋒長勁而圓：長則含墨，可以取運動；勁則剛而有力，圓則妍美……蓋紙筆墨，皆書法之助也。<sup>35</sup>

For the *kai* (regular) script, the ink should always be dry, but not too dry. For *xing* (running) and *cao* (cursive) script, it should be a combination of dry and moist – moist to make it attractive and dry to avoid excessive novelty. When the

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<sup>34</sup> Huang, Tingjian. *Huang Wenjie gong zhengji* 黃文節公正集 (Selected Works of Huang Tingjian). Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2001. 676.

<sup>35</sup> Jiang, Kui. *Xu shu pu* 續書譜 (Sequel to the “Treatise on Calligraphy”). In Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 247.

ink is too thick, the brush will stick. When the ink is too dry, the stroke will be lifeless. These matters must not be ignored, either. The tip of the brush should be long, supple, and rounded. When it is long, it absorbs more ink and is free to move. When it is supple, it is firm and strong. When it is rounded, [the stroke] is attractive...Paper, brush, and ink are essential tools of calligraphy.<sup>36</sup>

Few calligraphers and critics will deny the fact that paper, brush, and ink are essential tools in calligraphic practice; opinions vary as to what kinds of brushes or inks a calligrapher should use. Jiang Kui had preferences for brushes that have long and rounded tips, which are not necessarily favoured by other calligraphers. In fact, discussions on the materials constitute a substantial part of calligraphy criticism. In *Bizhen tu* 筆陣圖 (Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush), an early treatise that is variously attributed to Wei Furen 衛夫人 (272-349) and Wang Xizhi, one reads that:

筆要取崇山絕仞中兔毛，八九月收之，其筆頭長一寸，管長五寸，鋒齊腰強者。<sup>37</sup>

As for brushes, one must obtain those made with the hair of rabbits that live in the precipitous cliffs of lofty mountains. The rabbits should be caught in the eighth or ninth month. The brush point should be one *cun* [ancient Chinese unit of measurement] long, the handle five *cun*. The tip should be even and the waist strong.<sup>38</sup>

Some calligraphers have more definite brush preferences. The Song Dynasty calligrapher Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), for example, especially favoured the *sanzhuo*

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<sup>36</sup> Based on Chang Ch'ung-ho's translation with modifications. Chang, Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Based on Richard Barnhart's translation with modifications. Barnhart, Richard M. "Wei Fu-Jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy." *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

散卓 brush of the Zhuge 諸葛 family:<sup>39</sup>

東坡平生喜用宣城諸葛家筆，以為諸葛之下者猶勝它處工者。平生書字，每得諸葛筆則宛轉可意，自以謂筆論窮於此。<sup>40</sup>

Su Shi loved using the Zhuge brushes of Xuanzhou and thought the worst of Zhuge brushes superior to the finest ones of other manufacturers. Over the course of his life, he found that, using the Zhuge brush, he could effortlessly control the brush's every turn, leading him to conclude that it was the perfect brush.<sup>41</sup>

The brush exemplifies the importance of the writing tools for calligraphers. In a specific calligraphic activity, *de qi* 得器 or obtaining the right tools, in the sense of Sun Guoting, means that the calligrapher can acquire his or her preferred brushes, inks, and papers. It also should be noted that writing tools are always the production of a specific era, and calligraphic creation is conditioned, to some degree, by the material culture of a time. The above mentioned *sanzhuo* brush, for example, was highly sought after by the literati like Su Shi in the Northern Song dynasty.<sup>42</sup> The contemporary calligraphy theorist Huang Jun understands this as the “time pattern” in calligraphic creation, by which he means that a calligrapher's creative activity is inevitably restrained by the material culture and zeitgeist of his or her time.<sup>43</sup>

The calligraphic creative process is, in a sense, the interaction of the calligrapher and the writing materials, or the “person-agents” and “thing-agents” as discussed by the Anthropologist Alfred Gell.<sup>44</sup> Before a creative activity, the calligrapher does not know

<sup>39</sup> For detailed discussions on the materiality in Northern Song calligraphy, see He, Yanchuan. “The Materiality, Style, and Culture of Calligraphy in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> Huang, Tingjian. *Shanggu tiba* 山谷題跋 (Colophons by Huang Tingjian). Shanghai: Shanghai Far East Publishers, 1999. 137.

<sup>41</sup> Translation based on He, Yanchuan. “The Materiality, Style, and Culture of Calligraphy in the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127).” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2013. 150-151.

<sup>42</sup> For a detailed discussion of *sanzhuo* brush, see *ibid.*, 184-187.

<sup>43</sup> Huang, Jun. *Shufa chuanguo yinlun* 書法創作引論 (An Introduction to Calligraphic Creation). Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2014. 101.

<sup>44</sup> Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1998. 17.

exactly the effect that will be brought about by the initial touching of the brush, ink and paper, though the calligrapher can of course control the types of writing tools used. Often it is the case that creative calligraphers, after putting down the first strokes or characters or lines, make adjustments in the use of brush and ink based on the actual effect perceived. And the calligraphic creative process thus could be understood as the calligrapher's successive using, controlling, or harnessing the writing materials; the final outcome is nothing but the ink on paper. The materials form part of the calligraphic creativity and, as Fuyubi Nakamura put it, "a calligraphic work is the outcome of an interplay between the 'natural' creativity of materials and the creative efforts of persons to resist, control, embrace, or prompt it."<sup>45</sup> Nakamura may have been familiar with the words of the seventeenth-century calligrapher Fu Shan 傅山 (1607-1684):

吾極知書法佳境，第欲如此而不得如此者，心手、紙筆、主客互有乖左之故也。<sup>46</sup>

I know perfectly well the optimal state in [the creation of] calligraphy. It's just that one who intends to get into that state may not attain to it, and the reason lies in the discord arising from the interaction of mind/hand, paper/brush, the subjective and the objective.

In classical calligraphy criticism, Fu Shan might be the only calligrapher who employs the exact terms of "subjective" (*zhu* 主) and "objective" (*ke* 客) to describe the factors that influence calligraphic practice.

This section discussed the two objective factors *shi* (time) and *qi* (tools). For Sun Guoting, these two aspects are less important than that of *zhi* (mental disposition), a term that contains several nuances and touches on the calligraphers' psychological

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<sup>45</sup> Nakamura, Fuyubi. "Creating or Performing Words? Observations on Contemporary Japanese Calligraphy." In Hallam, Elizabeth, and Tim Ingold, eds. *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*. Oxford: Berg, 2007. 95.

<sup>46</sup> Pan, Yungao. *Qing qianqi shulun* 清前期書論 (Early Qing Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2003. 74.

aspects in the creative process, to which the next sections turn.

### 4.3 *Xin* and *Shou* acting in harmony

Implicitly or explicitly, various discourses have understood the creation of Chinese calligraphy – and Chinese arts at large – as involving what I have described above as the mental and physical aspects. These two aspects of creation are just hinted in the above-mentioned Zhang Huaiguan’s tripartite scheme: from *wu* (things in the world) to *xin* (mind), and from *xin* to *mo* (ink or brushwork). In Yu-kung Kao’s “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”, this idea was clearly formulated. Creation of Chinese poetry or calligraphy, according to Kao, includes both acts of composition and of execution.<sup>47</sup>

Closely reading texts on calligraphy, it is manifest that these two aspects or acts in calligraphic creation have been adequately described by calligraphic discourses on *xin* (mind) and *shou* 手 (hand). These two concepts, along with their denotations or extensions that I will discuss below, pervade calligraphic criticism. Being separated, the functions of *xin* and *shou* in calligraphy roughly correspond to what Kao called mental composition and physical execution. On many occasions, however, they are bound together, appearing in the same idioms that are descriptive of calligraphic creativity, such as:

心手雙暢 – mind and hand acting in harmony

無間心手 – let there be no divergence between your mind and your hand

心手相忘 – the mind and the hand forget one another

妙在心手 – the subtlety [calligraphic practice] lies in mind and hand

心悟腕从 – the mind is alert and the wrist complied

心昏手迷 – the mind gets confused, the hand goes astray

心手不符 – the mind and the hand do not fit together

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<sup>47</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”. In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 69.

If Western aesthetic theory successively took inspiration and imagination as the crucial components in the process of artistic creation,<sup>48</sup> I argue, the determining factors in the creation of Chinese calligraphy are *xin* and *shou*, or the mind and hand. The phrases above also reveal the relationship between the two aspects. Successful calligraphic creation, as the first four phrases demonstrate, result from the effective communication, or seamless interaction, between the calligrapher's *xin* and *shou*. Moreover, in calligraphic creation, a calligrapher's mental activities and his or her physical movements do not occur in a particular order; they cannot be distinguished. Commenting on the classical four-stage scheme in explaining artistic creation, i.e. the stages of preparation, incubation, inspiration, and elaboration,<sup>49</sup> Beardsley wrote that "all four of these activities are mixed together; they are constantly (or alternately) going on throughout the whole process."<sup>50</sup> Beardsley's opinion is readily applicable to the Chinese discourses on the two aspects of calligraphic creation. This is why I characterise them as components rather than phases or stages.

The other way around, the discordance between the calligrapher's *xin* and *shou* leads directly to failed calligraphic creation. To cite the words of the Ming scholar Zhao Yiguang 趙宦光 (1559-1625): "If a calligrapher's mind and hand do not fit together, he cannot accomplish calligraphy (心手不符, 即不成書)."<sup>51</sup> For the convenience of discussion, the rest of this chapter examines calligraphic discourses on *xin* and *shou* separately, but readers should bear in mind that the acts as they are performed respectively by *xin* and *shou* cannot be separated in understanding the creative activity of Chinese calligraphy.

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<sup>48</sup> Gaut, Berys, and Paisley Livingston, eds. *The Creation of Art: New Essays in Philosophical Aesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 15-20.

<sup>49</sup> For discussions of the four stages of artistic creativity, see Patrick, Catharine. "Creative Thought in Artists". *Journal of Psychology* 4 (1937): 35-73; Wallas, Graham. *The Art of Thought*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1926. 79-96.

<sup>50</sup> Beardsley, Monroe C. "On the Creation of Art". *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 23. 3 (1965): 293.

<sup>51</sup> Zhao, Yiguang. *Hanshan zhoutan* 寒山帚談 (Cherished Views in Cold Mountain). In Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 4. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1992. 101.

#### 4.4 *Xin* and the Internalisation

Yang Xiong's 揚雄 (53 BC-18 AD) dictum from the Han dynasty that "speech is the sound of the mind, and calligraphy is the picture of the mind (言，心聲也，書，心畫也)" has been reiterated by calligraphers and theorists over the successive dynasties, though the way it is expressed might be slightly different. Sheng Ximing 盛熙明 (fl. 1361) of the Yuan dynasty believed calligraphy to be the "traces of the mind".<sup>52</sup> Liu Xizai 劉熙載 (1813-1881) of the Qing dynasty declared that calligraphic practice is all about the cultivation of one's mind.<sup>53</sup> A more vivid description is to be found in the Northern Song art historian Guo Ruoxu's 郭若虛 (act. 1070-1075) *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌 (An Overview of Painting):

且如世之相押字之術謂之心印。本自心源，想成形迹，迹與心合，是之謂印。爰及萬法，緣慮施為，隨心所合，皆得名印；矧乎書畫，發之於情思，契之於綃楮，則非印而何？<sup>54</sup>

In a comparable fashion, moreover, in the common practice of judging personal signatures, these are called "mind-prints." They originate from the source of the mind and are perfected in the imagination to take shape as traces, which, being in accord with the mind are called "prints." If one enlarges on the myriad ways in which activities follow thought, implementing this accord with the mind, they may be called "prints." Even more so in the case of calligraphy and painting, since they issue from emotions and thoughts to be matched on silk and paper,

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<sup>52</sup> In Chinese: 夫書者，心之迹也。Sheng, Ximing. *Fashu kao* 法書考 (Records and Notes on Calligraphy). In Lu, Fusheng. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 2. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1993. 812.

<sup>53</sup> In Chinese: 故書也者，心學也。Liu, Xizai. *Shu gai* 書概 (A Précis of Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Wan Qing shulun* 晚清書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy in Late Qing Dynasty). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2004. 99.

<sup>54</sup> Guo, Ruoxu. *Tuhua jianwen zhi* 圖畫見聞誌 (An Overview of Painting). In Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編 (Classified Collection of Historical Texts on Chinese Painting). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998. 59-60.

what are they if not “prints”?<sup>55</sup>

The above passage raises several key points of the role of *xin* (mind) in the creation of Chinese painting and calligraphy. Chinese visual artworks, here calligraphy and painting, have their inception in *xin*, processed by imagination. *Xin* is the pivotal concept here: imagination, emotion, and thought are all connected with *xin* in Chinese philosophy. To understand the theory which seeks to explain an artist’s mental activities in calligraphic creation, it is necessary to clarify the import of *xin* in Chinese philosophical context.

The earliest explication of *xin* is provided by Mencius (372-289 BC):

耳目之官不思，而蔽於物，物交物，則引之而已矣。心之官則思，思則得之，不思則不得也。<sup>56</sup>

The organs of the ears and the eyes do not think and are glued to things. The material things act on the material senses and lead them astray. That is all. The function of the mind is to think. If we think, we will get them (the principles of things). If we do not think, we will not get them.<sup>57</sup>

For Mencius, the *xin*, like the ears and eyes, is an organ, but the difference lies in that only the *xin* is assigned with the function of thinking. Mencius did not pinpoint the relation of the mind to other sense organs, a subject that was more fully discussed by another Confucian philosopher Xunzi (312-239 BC):

耳目鼻口形能各有接而不相能也，夫是之謂天官。心居中虛，以治五官，

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<sup>55</sup> Translation cited from Bush, Susan, and Hsio-Yen Shih, comps. and eds. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 96.

<sup>56</sup> Ma, Xinmin, and Li Xueqin. *Mengzi zhushu* 孟子注疏 (Commentaries and subcommentaries on Mengzi). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1999. 314.

<sup>57</sup> Based on Wing-tsit Chan’s translation with modifications. Chan, Wing-tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. 59.



夫是之謂天君。<sup>58</sup>

The ears, eyes, nose and mouth each are receptors and cannot exchange their faculties. These are meant by the senses given by heaven. The heart/mind is lodged in the central cavity [the thorax] to control the five senses. This is what is meant by the heavenly prince.<sup>59</sup>

心有徵知。徵知，則緣耳而知聲可也，緣目而知形可也。<sup>60</sup>

The mind gives meaning to impressions. It gives meaning to impressions, and only then, by means of the ear, sound can be known. And by means of the eye, form can be known.<sup>61</sup>

Xunzi pointed out the dominant role of the mind and its ability to collect the material presented by the senses. “The five senses encounter external objects and the mind is able to recognize them by the impression left on the senses.”<sup>62</sup> For Xunzi, it is only *xin* that can process and understand the perceptions.

Philosophical discussions of *xin* also refer to its capacity for imagination. In a piece of annotation, the seventeenth-century philosopher Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619-1692) wrote that:

風雷無形而有象，心無象而有覺，故一舉念而千里之境事現於俄頃，速於風雷矣。<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Liang, Qixiong. 荀子簡釋 (Xunzi: A Concise Elucidation). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983. 223.

<sup>59</sup> Translation cited from Zhang, Dainian; Edmund Ryden, trans. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 394-395.

<sup>60</sup> Liang, Qixiong. 荀子簡釋 (Xunzi: A Concise Elucidation). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983. 313.

<sup>61</sup> Zhang, Dainian; Edmund Ryden, trans. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 395.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 395.

<sup>63</sup> Wang, Fuzhi. *Chuanshan yishu* 船山遺書 (Writings Left Behind by Wang Fuzhi). Vol. 6. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999. 3683.

The wind and thunder have no form but have *xiang* (image, the normative visual schematisation of a thing). The mind is without *xiang* yet has awareness. Thus merely to think of something and then even if it be 1,000 *li* away it will be present in a flash. It is quicker than the wind or thunder.<sup>64</sup>

It should be mentioned that, for Wang Fuzhi, the *xin* does not exist independently of external things and its ability to imagine is not independent of the sense organs, of what has been seen and heard.<sup>65</sup>

Besides its ability to think and imagine, *xin* is often germane to a range of psychological aspects or mental phenomena like *xing* 性 (nature or temperament), *qing* 情 (emotion or feeling), *zhi* 志 (will or where the mind goes) and *yi* 意 (intentions, ideas). The interconnection between these terms is complex in philosophical discussions after Northern Song, and outside of the parameters of this thesis. What can be said, however, is that some neo-Confucians like Zhang Zai 張載 (1020-1077) and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) believed that human nature, emotions, intentions and will, arise from the *xin* (mind-heart). Zhu had it that:

心者，一身之主宰；意者，心之所發；情者，心之所動；志者，心之所之。

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The mind is the master of one body. Intentions are what are issued by the mind.

Emotions are the motion of the mind. The will is the tendency of the mind.<sup>67</sup>

Having introduced the denotations of *xin* in Chinese philosophy, I now turn to the use of the term in calligraphic criticism. A calligrapher's *xin* or mind participates

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<sup>64</sup> Zhang, Dainian; Edmund Ryden, trans. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 406.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 406. In this respect, the *xin*'s capacity to imagine is no different from the imagination in much Western aesthetics: it is "of" or "about" something, and it is related to perceptual experience.

<sup>66</sup> Zhu, Xi, and Lü Zuqian, comps. *Zhuzi jinsi lu* 朱子近思錄 (Reflections on Things at Hand). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2000. 234.

<sup>67</sup> Translation cited from Zhang, Dainian; Edmund Ryden, trans. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 402.

actively in creation, and all means of participation are inseparable from the various philosophical dimensions of the term. I propose that four key concepts, *guan* 觀, *qing* 情, *xing* 性 and *yi* 意, are of help to disentangle the various aspects of the mind of a creative calligrapher. And it is one of my arguments that these aspects of the calligrapher's mind mix together and constitute the aesthetic idea, which will then be realised by virtue of the calligrapher's bodily movement. The synthesis of these mental aspects, or the generation of the aesthetic idea, is what I mean by the process of "internalisation".

#### 4.4.1 *Guan*: perception of the things

The first aspect of a creative mind in calligraphic creation is the calligrapher's perception, mostly visual perception, of the world, or "the ten thousand things". This stage could be understood as *xin*'s processing of the information that is initially collected by the calligrapher's seeing. The result of the perception is the generation of *xiang* 象 (images), a term that has been introduced in the first section of this chapter and needs more study. There are in fact two types of *xiang* in this process: *wuxiang* 物象, the images of things, and *xinxiang* 心象, the internal images in the calligrapher's mind. According to Zhu Zhirong, *wuxiang*, through the mind's processing and after being integrated with the artist's ideas and sentiments, becomes *xinxiang*.<sup>68</sup>

In calligraphic creation, the aesthetic term *xiang* thus entails the object and the subject, nature and human. A Western mind might find it hard to connect calligraphy or handwriting with nature, but for a Chinese aesthetic mind, as Ronald Egan observed, calligraphy has the potential to "capture or replicate the myriad transformations of the cosmos."<sup>69</sup> This potentiality is, to some degree, closely related to the pictographic characteristics of Chinese characters as discussed in Chapter Two. But from a broader

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<sup>68</sup> Zhu, Zhirong. *Zhongguo shenmei lilun* 中國審美理論 (Chinese Aesthetic Theories). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005. 159.

<sup>69</sup> Egan, Ronald. "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy". *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 387.

perspective, calligraphy's potential to create a cosmic analogue is bound up with one of the principal objectives of Chinese artistic creation, which in the words of Wen Fong is to "apprehend the principles of nature through graphic means."<sup>70</sup> The fifth-century scholar-official Yan Yanzhi 顏延之 (384-456), for example, distinguished three such graphic means:

圖載之意有三：一曰圖理，卦象是也；二曰圖識，字學是也；三月圖形，繪畫是也。<sup>71</sup>

There are three diagrammatic representations. The first is the representation of nature's principles, and the forms of hexagrams are such. The second is the picturing of concepts, and the study of written characters have to do with this. The third is the representation of forms, and this is painting.<sup>72</sup>

From the very beginning, theories of calligraphy in China emphasise the simulation of the nature's transformation. The question, however, is how one could grasp the transformation of the cosmos. The aesthetic term *guan* 觀 (see, view, observe), denoting the way a Chinese artistic mind observes objects, partially answers the question. Liu Xizai, for example, once ended his *Shu gai* 書概 (A Précis of Calligraphy) with the saying that "there are two types of *guan* (viewing or observing) in the study of calligraphy – *guanwu* 觀物 (observing the things) and *guanwo* 觀我 (observing the self)."<sup>73</sup> A more vivid description of *guanwu* is provided by the Tang essayist Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824):

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<sup>70</sup> Fong, Wen, et al. *Images of the Mind: Selections from the Edward L. Elliott Family and John B. Elliott Collections of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting at the Art Museum, Princeton University*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1987. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Zhang, Yanyuan. *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Record of Famous Painters through the Ages). In Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編 (Classified Collection of Historical Texts on Chinese Painting). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998. 27.

<sup>72</sup> Based on Susan Bush's translation with modifications: Bush, Susan, and Hsio-Yen Shih, comps. and eds. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 51.

<sup>73</sup> Chinese text: 學書者有二觀：曰觀物，曰觀我。Liu, Xizai. *Shu gai* 書概 (A Précis of Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Wan Qing shulun* 晚清書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy in Late Qing Dynasty). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2004. 102.

觀于物，見山水崖谷，鳥獸蟲魚，草木之花實，日月列星，風雨水火，雷霆霹靂，歌舞戰鬥，天地萬物之變……一寓於書。<sup>74</sup>

[Zhang Xu] views and observes the things: the mountains and rivers, cliffs and valleys, birds and beasts, insects and fishes, the flowers and fruits of vegetation, the sun, the moon and the stars, the wind and rain, the water and fire, the thunder, the songs and dances, the battles. The transformation of the ten thousand things in the world... can all be lodged in his calligraphy.

The things themselves, of course, won't lodge in a work of calligraphy, as I discussed in the first section of this chapter; it is *wuxiang* or the image of things that has the potential to be employed in calligraphic creation. *Wu* (the things) are clearly differentiated from *xiang* or the image of things in Chinese aesthetics, and the activity of *guan* connects the two. This perceptual process – from the things to the image of things – is captured by another term *guanwu quxiang* 觀物取象 (examine the things and capture their image). An important aesthetic term for both Chinese literature and visual arts, *guanwu quxiang* was first proposed in *The Book of Changes*:

古者包犧氏之王天下也，仰則觀象於天，俯則觀法於地，觀鳥獸之文與地之宜，近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。<sup>75</sup>

Anciently, when Bao-xi had come to the rule of all under heaven, looking up, he contemplated the brilliant forms exhibited in the sky, and looking down he surveyed the patterns shown on the earth. He contemplated the ornamental

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<sup>74</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhong wantang wudai shulun* 中晚唐五代書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy from the Mid- and Late Tang and the Five Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 251.

<sup>75</sup> Li, Xueqin, comm. *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (Rectified Interpretations of the Book of Changes). Taipei: Wu-Nan Book Inc., 2001. 380.

appearances of birds and beasts and the (different) suitabilities of the soil. Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised the eight trigrams, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (operations working secretly), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things.<sup>76</sup>

For the contemporary aesthetician Ye Lang, the above passage reveals the modes of *guan* or seeing in the capturing of *xiang*, which is to say that the artist should not see or observe the things from a fixed angle, but instead should look up and down. Besides, the object of our seeing should encompass both the macrocosm like the “forms exhibited in the sky” and the microcosm like the “appearances of the birds and beasts.”<sup>77</sup> In *The Book of Changes*, it is said that one aims to capture the “attributes of the spirit-like” and the “qualities of the myriads of things” through this way of *guan*. In the context of Chinese aesthetics, a creative artist perceives and examines the external things with the purpose of capturing the *zhen* 真 (reality) within. Jing Hao 荆浩 (870-930) made a clear statement of this point in *Bifa ji* 筆法記 (A Note on the Art of the Brush):

度物象而取其真……若不知術，苟似可也，圖真不可及也。曰：何以為似？何以為真？叟曰：似真者得其形遺其氣，真者氣質俱盛…故知書畫者，名賢之所學也。<sup>78</sup>

One examines the objects and grasps their reality...If you do not know this method [of understanding truth], you may even get lifelikeness but never achieve reality in painting. I questioned: “what do you call lifelikeness and what do you call reality?” The old man answered: “Lifelikeness means to achieve the

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<sup>76</sup> Legge, James, trans. *The I Ching*. New York: Dover Publications, 1963. 382-383.

<sup>77</sup> Ye, Lang. *Zhongguo meixueshi dagang* 中國美學史大綱 (An Outline of the History of Chinese Aesthetics). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1985. 74.

<sup>78</sup> Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編 (Classified Collection of Historical Texts on Chinese Painting). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998. 605.

form of the object but to leave out its spirit. Reality means that both spirit and substance are strong.”...Now I understand that calligraphy and painting are to be learned only by the wise.<sup>79</sup>

We have seen that *guanwu quxiang* means examining the things and capturing their image. But, Jing Hao proposed that one should examine objects and grasp their reality. These two statements are not contradictory. Rather, they are talking about the same thing. For one to capture the image of things, one has to grasp the reality of them, and one who grasps the reality of things secures the essence and image, or the *wuxiang*. For Jing Hao, the reality of the perceptual object is more about the “spirit” of it than its form, an idea that resonates in Lin Yutang’s “animistic principle”. Concerning the perception of things and the grasping of reality in calligraphy, it is worthwhile to cite one last piece of writing by the early Tang calligrapher Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638):

稟陰陽而動靜，體萬物以成形……故知書道玄妙，必資神遇，不可以力求也。機巧必須心悟，不可以目取也。<sup>80</sup>

[Chinese calligraphy] complies with the *yin* and *yang* in its motion or stillness, and follows the myriad things in the shaping of its forms...Thus we know that the art of calligraphy is subtle and mysterious. [Its subtleties] rely on the spiritual perception of things and cannot be forced. Nature’s intimations and artful cleverness have to be perceived by the mind; they are not accessible to the eyes.

Yu’s statement points out the basic feature of the mode of *guanwu* (seeing or observing the things) in Chinese artistic creation: with the eyes, one catches sight of the

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<sup>79</sup> Bush, Susan, and Hsio-Yen Shih, comps. and eds. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 146.

<sup>80</sup> Yu, Shinan. *Bi sui lun* 筆髓論 (On the Essence of the Brushwork). In Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 113.

things, and with *xin* or the mind, one captures the spirit of them.

#### 4.4.2 *Qing* and *xing*: feeling and temperament

The second aspect of a calligrapher's mind in artistic creation that has been recognised in traditional calligraphy theory is *qingxing* 情性. *Qingxing* is a compound term in calligraphy criticism where *qing* refers to “sentiment”, “feeling” and “emotion”, and *xing* means “individuating nature” or “temperament”. In Chinese philosophy, the two are etymologically associated: *xing* is one's innate characteristics, and *qing* arises when the innate nature is acted on or touched off by external things.<sup>81</sup> Both also have the same semantic component – i.e., the radical 亠 (meaning “mind”) – as part of their character. This etymological association might explain why these two terms often appeared as a compound in texts on various Chinese arts. In the six-century *Wenxin diaolong*, for example, *qingxing*, one's affections and nature, is elevated as an important factor in literary creation: integrated with a writer's talent and learning and habit, it gives force and beauty to literary works, and supports the beauty of an argument.<sup>82</sup> For arts concerning ink and brush, namely painting and calligraphy, the artist's *qingxing* is considered to be the foundation of his or her brushwork. The Qing dynasty painter Shen Zongqian 沈宗騫 (1736-1820) once wrote:

筆墨之道本乎性情，凡所以涵養性情者則存之，所以殘賊性情者則去之，自然俗日離而雅可日幾也。<sup>83</sup>

The Tao of brush and ink originates from [the painter's] nature and affections (*xingqing*). All that could cultivate the subjective disposition (*xingqing*) should

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<sup>81</sup> For a detailed discussion of the relationship between *xing* and *qing*, see the category of “*xing* and *qing*” in Cheng, Fuwang, ed. *Zhongguo meixue fanchou cidian* 中國美學範疇辭典 (A Dictionary of Chinese Aesthetic Terms). Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1995. 462-476.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 212-215, 242.

<sup>83</sup> Shen, Zongqian. *Jiezhou xuehua bian lun shanshui* 芥舟學畫編論山水 (Jiezhou's Study on Painting: Landscape). In Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編 (Classified Collection of Historical Texts on Chinese Painting). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998. 895.



be preserved, and all that would erode the subjective disposition should be eliminated. And then, the vulgar or the low will gradually leave, the refined or the elegant approach.

Another Qing art critic Liu Xizai, while discussing the brushwork of calligraphy, also wrote:

筆性墨情，皆以人之情性為本。是則理性情者，書之首務也。<sup>84</sup>

The characteristics (*xing*) and the emotion (*qing*) of the brushwork all originate from the subjective disposition (*qingxing*) of the artist. Settling one's disposition (*xingqing*) is the foremost concern in calligraphy.

For these two art critics of the Qing dynasty, the brushwork in both calligraphy and painting has roots in the artist's *qingxing* or *xingqing*, which could be rendered as the subjective disposition. But *qing* and *xing* are two different aesthetic categories, after all. In calligraphy criticism, the two are used separately most of the time. To understand the roles of *qing* and *xing* in the way art theorists have explained the mental activities of the creative subject in calligraphy, we need to discuss them individually.

*Qing*, the calligrapher's sentiment or emotion, occupies an active role in early texts on calligraphic creation. As early as the second century, Cai Yong proposed that a calligrapher should allow his or her emotions to flow freely before the writing.<sup>85</sup> Wang Sengqian 王僧虔 (419-513) said that a calligrapher's "mind and hand should be able to convey his or her emotion" in calligraphic creation.<sup>86</sup> The emphasis on the

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<sup>84</sup> Liu, Xizai. *Yi gai* 藝概 (Generalisation of Art). In Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 715.

<sup>85</sup> Chinese text: 欲書，先散懷抱，任情恣性，然後書之。Cai, Yong. "Bi lun" 筆論 (On Brushwork). In Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Chinese text: 心手達情。Wang, Sengqian. *Bi yi zan* 筆意贊 (Adjunct Verse on Brush Writing). In Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 62.

expression of the calligrapher's sentiment reached its peak in Tang dynasty texts on the art, which for Ronald Egan is paired with the emphasis on the art's potential to capture nature's reality:

Actually, sentiments are regularly paired with something seemingly impersonal, the cosmic transformations (*pien*) of the universe. Calligraphy is said to have dual potentials: to capture or replicate the myriad transformation of the cosmos and to express the sentiments of the calligrapher...What is distinctive about T'ang writings is the important place given to sentiment, which is what moves the calligrapher to duplicate with his brush the cosmic transformations.<sup>87</sup>

In Chinese aesthetics, the artist's affection or emotion relates to the subject's perception of external things, which in the words of Liu Xie is *duwu xingqing* 睹物興情 (the sight of natural objects excites the affection) or *qingyi wuxing* 情以物興 (feeling surges in response to objects). In calligraphic creation, the emotion that arises out of the subject's perception of natural things, as Egan said, propels the calligrapher to make a cosmic analogue by means of calligraphic forms. In this regard, the emotion of the calligrapher serves as the agent between the external things and the cosmic transformation manifested in a calligraphic work. This is reminiscent of Liu Xie's remarks on literary creation: "One responds with varying emotions to the varying phases [of things], and the form of language used depends on the emotion."<sup>88</sup>

The term *qing* is a clearly defined concept in Chinese philosophy. It typically refers to the "seven *qing*" (joy, anger, grief, fear, love, dislike, desire), or the "six *qing*" (liking, disliking, joy, anger, grief, happiness).<sup>89</sup> For some critics, all of these emotions are among those mental states that could be expressed in calligraphic creation. The most famous passage is from Han Yu's *Song Gao Xian shangren xu* 送高閑上人序

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<sup>87</sup> Egan, Ronald. "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy". *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 387-388.

<sup>88</sup> Chinese text: 情以物遷，辭以情。Liu, Xie; Vincent Yu-chung Shih, trans. *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959. 246.

<sup>89</sup> For a detailed discussion of *qing* in Chinese philosophy, see Zhang, Dainian; Edmund Ryden, trans. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002. 383-387.

(Dedication Sent to the Monk Gao Xian):

往時張旭善草書，不治他技。喜怒窘窮，憂悲、愉佚、怨恨、思慕、酣醉、無聊、不平，有動于心，必於草書焉發之。<sup>90</sup>

Zhang Xu excelled in cursive script in the past, and he did not study other craft. Joy and anger, distress and melancholy, happiness and resentment, yearning and admiration, carefree drink and boredom, indignation and discontent, and all that touches his mind-heart will be sure to be expressed in his creation of cursive script.

Zhang Xu 張旭 (675-759) was hailed as the sage of the cursive calligraphy (*caosheng* 草聖), whose calligraphic works (Fig. 4-1) have been described by critics after the Tang dynasty as extraordinary and eccentric, or wonderfully expressive. Han Yu's passage above on Zhang Xu's calligraphic creation, for some contemporary calligraphy theorists like Hsiung Ping-Ming, also exemplifies the "lyrical school" in Chinese calligraphy theory.<sup>91</sup> It should be noted that it's hard to find similar commentaries as Han's in the discussions of other scripts like seal and regular script, which might help demonstrate the proposition that the cursive script is the most suitable for expressing emotions.

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<sup>90</sup> Han, Yu. *Song gaoxian shangren xu* 送高閑上人序 (Dedication sent to the Monk Gao Xian). In Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 292.

<sup>91</sup> Hsiung, Ping-Ming. *Zhongguo shufa lilun tixi* 中國書法理論體系 (Theories of Chinese Calligraphy). Tianjin: Tianjin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002. 75-108. For an in-depth discussion of Han Yu's remarks on Zhang Xu, see also Lee, Tsui-Ying. "Qinggan yu xingshi gongwu: lun Han Yu song gaoxian shangren xu zhi shufa meixue sixiang" 情感與形式共舞：論韓愈《送高閑上人序》之書法美學思想 (The Relationship between Emotion and Form: On Calligraphic Aesthetic Thought in Han Yu's 'Song Gaoxian Shangren Xu'). *Chinese Studies* 26.4 (2008): 67-97.

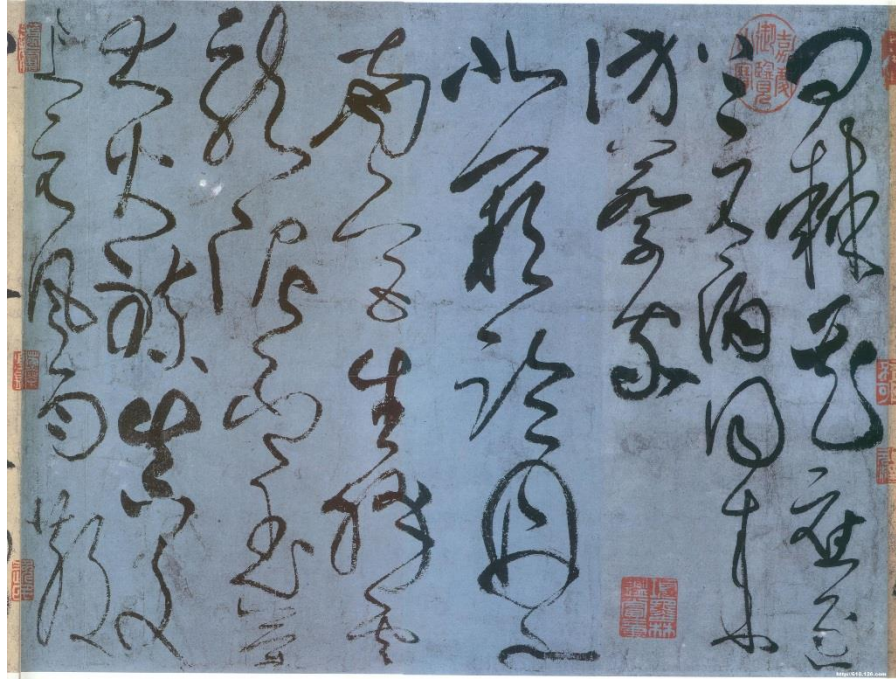


Fig. 4-1, Attributed to Zhang Xu, *Four Ancient Poems* (detail), ink on paper, cursive script. From Ouyang, Zhongshi, Wen Fong, eds. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 221.

Calligraphy can express the emotions of the artist, and conversely different emotions may result in stylistic variations within the same calligrapher's creations. As the fourteenth-century calligrapher Chen Yizeng 陳繹曾 wrote:

喜怒哀樂，各有分數。喜即氣合而字舒，怒則氣粗而字險，哀即氣鬱而字斂，樂則氣平而字麗。情有重輕，則字之斂舒險麗亦有淺深，變化無窮。

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[The emotions of] joy, anger, grief, and happiness all have their typical patterns. Being joyful brings [the calligrapher] harmonious *qi* or inner force, hence outstretched writing. Being angry brings disagreeable *qi*, hence precipitous

<sup>92</sup> Chen, Yizeng. *Hanlin yaojue* 翰林要訣 (Essential Precepts of the Hanlin Academy). In Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 490.

writing. Being sorrowful brings melancholy *qi*, hence constrained writing. Being happy brings tranquil *qi*, hence beautiful writing. There is a range of emotions, thus the writing, be it constrained or outstretched, precipitous or beautiful, changes with endless variations.

Chen's words may not be hard to understand in the context of philosophy of mind, as for some philosophers of mind, all emotions can affect the body to varying degrees.<sup>93</sup> Researchers on moral and aesthetic emotions using neuroimaging, for example, have found activation in brain areas that are associated with bodily responses, such as the cingulate cortex and the insula.<sup>94</sup> Historians of Chinese art normally would not employ the factor of emotion to explain the stylistic changes that occurred in the work of the same artist; more frequently-discussed factors include the accumulation of the artist's knowledge and experience, and the artist's copying of different models in different periods. Nevertheless, if a mature calligrapher's writing has changed considerably in one single calligraphic creation or in several creations within a short period of time, why can't we ascribe this change to the fact that different emotions on the part of the same artist will directly influence the motion of the writer's fingers, hand, wrist, and arm? With this in mind, we might understand why Yan Zhenqing's 顏真卿 (709-785) *Ji zhi wengao* 祭侄文稿 (Eulogy for a Nephew, Fig. 4-2) – a handscroll that was written with deep sorrow and indignation after Yan's nephew had been killed during an armed rebellion – has stylistic changes between the beginning and the ending lines. Yan's scroll starts with the running-standard script (*zhen xing* 真行) on the right side where individual characters are mostly separated and executed in a clear way, but ends with the cursive script on the left side where strokes of the characters are merged together. It also should be noted that Chen Yizeng did not explicitly declare in the above excerpt that emotions will directly influence the writing; he introduced the term *qi* 氣

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<sup>93</sup> Prinz, Jesse. "Emotions: Motivating Feelings". In McLaughlin, Brian P., Ansgar Beckermann, and Sven Walter, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009. 678-690.

<sup>94</sup> Moll, J., R. De Oliveira-Souza, and P. J. Eslinger. "Morals and the Human Brain: A Working Model." *Neuroreport* 14.3 (2003): 299-305; Vartanian, Oshin, and Vinod Goel. "Neuroanatomical Correlates of Aesthetic Preference for Paintings." *NeuroReport* 15.5 (2004): 893-897.

(inner force; intentional force; kinetic force). For Chen, the emotions influence the inner force within the calligrapher in the first place, which then leads to the changes in writing.

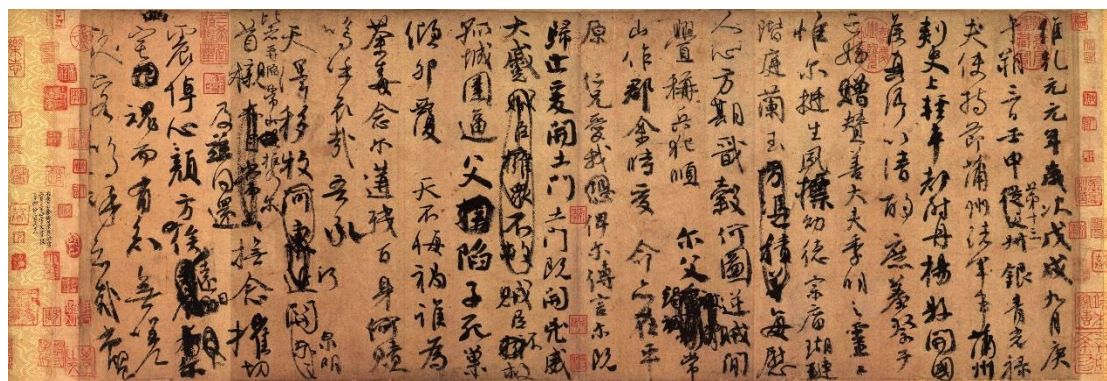


Fig. 4-2, Yan Zhenqing, *Eulogy for a Nephew*, ink on hemp paper, running script. From Ouyang Zhongshi, Wen Fong, eds. *Chinese Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008. 228-229.

As discussed earlier, according to calligraphy theorists, the emotion of a calligrapher is born out of his or her innate nature being stirred by the external things. Thus we can put it that, if calligraphic creation expresses the subject's emotion, the subject's *xing* or innate nature is displayed as well. The element of *qing* or emotion, as I noted, brings about the stylistic variations within an individual calligrapher's creations; the element of *xing*, for many critics, gives rise to the more fundamental stylistic differences among various calligraphers. The Tang art historian Zhang Huaiguan wrote:

如人面不同，性分各異，書道雖一，各有所便。順其情則業成，違其衷則功棄。<sup>95</sup>

Just as different people have different facial features, each individual has his or her own distinctive nature. Though the Tao of calligraphy is unitary, each calligrapher has his or her own specialty. [Those who] follow their natural

<sup>95</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhang Huaiguan shulun* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan's Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 244.

disposition will succeed and [those who] go against their inner heart will suffer defeat.

Calligraphers differ in their innate nature and hence their divergent creations. For Zhang Huaiguan, successful calligraphers should follow their innate nature, otherwise they will fail, with which another Tang critic Sun Guoting would not heartily agree. As Sun put it in *Shu pu* (A Treatise on Calligraphy):

雖學宗一家，而變成多體，莫不隨其性欲，便以為姿：質直者則徑挺不遒，剛狠者又倔強無潤，矜斂者弊於拘束，脫易者失於規矩……斯皆獨行之士，偏玩所乖。<sup>96</sup>

Even when a single master is taken as a model, many different styles will develop. Every person follows a natural inclination to shape one's own basic character: If a person is straight, the writing will be rigid and lacking in vigorous beauty; if a person is hard and ruthless, it will be stubbornly unsubmitive and lacking in suppleness; those who are very careful will have the defect of being unrelaxed; those who are careless and superficial will be lacking in exactitude...These are all people who go their own way and give in to their individual defects.<sup>97</sup>

That calligraphers with different natural inclinations studying the same models turn to develop different styles is not what Sun really intended to stress. Rather, Sun warned calligraphers about the deficiencies that are innate in many personality types, which will cause formal or stylistic weakness in one aspect or another. Sun's warning raises the issue of the manifestation of the artist's *xing*, of the relationship between a

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<sup>96</sup> Zhu, Jianxin, comm. *Sun Guoting shu pu jian zheng* 孫過庭書譜箋證 (An Annotated Edition of Sun Guoting's *Shu Pu*). Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1963. 113.

<sup>97</sup> Chang, Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 13.

calligrapher's innate nature and success or originality in calligraphic creation. For the Qing calligrapher Liang Yan 梁巘 (1710-1788), a calligrapher's ability to objectify his or her disposition comes after intensive learning from the past:

初宗一家，精深有得，繼采諸美，變動弗拘，乃為不掩性情，自辟門徑。

98

In the beginning, [a calligrapher] should closely study a single master until he or she fully captures the quintessence, and then the calligrapher should draw on other masters' beauties. [In this way], the calligrapher can constantly change without constraint. This is what is called "not covering one's disposition" and "open a new path by oneself".

Liang's statement attests to the point of the last chapter: a calligrapher cannot innovate without learning from the past. What should be noted here is that the spontaneous expression of a calligrapher's disposition, for Liang, relies on intensive and extensive skills training. In the words of Shen Zongqian, a contemporary of Liang, calligraphers unpack their natural disposition by means of the established rules and regulations that are handed down from the past.<sup>99</sup> In calligraphy criticism, learning from the masters is also called *xi* 習 (practice) or *gong* 功 (effort), which is integrated with *xing* to bring about original and wonderful calligraphic works. In the chapter on the Tang calligrapher Yang Ju 楊鉅, the Song imperial catalogue *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 (Catalogue of Calligraphy in the Xuanhe Era) recorded that:

獨鉅之立論，以性之與習自是兩途……其為言曰：習而無性者，其失也俗；

<sup>98</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Qing qianqi shulun* 清前期書論 (Early Qing Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2003. 189.

<sup>99</sup> In Chinese: 於是自出精意自闢性靈，以古人之規矩，開自己之生面。Shen, Zongqian. *Jiezhou xuehua bian lun shanshui* 芥舟學畫編論山水 (Jiezhou's Study on Painting: Landscape). In Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編 (Classified Collection of Historical Texts on Chinese Painting). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998. 899.



性而無習者，其失也狂。蓋以謂有規矩繩墨者其習也，至於超詣絕塵處，則非性不可。<sup>100</sup>

Yang Ju alone proposed that *xing* (innate nature and talent) and *xi* (study or practice) are naturally two approaches...He said that, “calligraphers who study hard but have no talent or individuality will end in being vulgar, calligraphers who have talent and individuality but don’t practise will end in being wild. Thus, study and practice bring well-disciplined calligraphers, but superb and refined calligraphy cannot be created without talent and individuality.”

Contemporary Chinese and Japanese annotators of *Xuanhe shupu*, like Gui Dizi and Hihara Toshikuni, understand the term *xing* here as innate talent.<sup>101</sup> In my opinion, *xing* here refers to both the talent and innate nature. Like the contrast between *xing* as talent and *xi* as study, *xing* as innate nature is also antithetical to *xi*: the latter emphasises following tradition while the former stresses following one’s nature. Nevertheless, be it talent or innate nature, they are all inherent in an individual calligrapher.

#### 4.4.3 Yi: intention and idea<sup>102</sup>

This section deals with what I consider to be the last aspect of a creative mind in calligraphic creation – *yi*. In ancient Chinese philosophy, *yi* 意 means both “intention” and “idea”, which means, according to Edmund Ryden, that it can be volunative or cognitive. As a widely used aesthetic category, *yi* has multiple dimensions in Chinese art theory. Stephen Owen, for example, summarised several common usages of *yi* in literary criticism: *yi* as “the clever interpretation of some material (much like the late

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<sup>100</sup> Gui, Dizi, comm. and trans. *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 (Catalogue of Calligraphy in the Xuanhe Era). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 81.

<sup>101</sup> Nakata, Yujiro, ed. *Chūgoku shoron taikē* 中國書論大系 (Study on Chinese Calligraphy). Vol. 5. Tokyo: Nigensha, 1978. 118; Gui, Dizi, comm. and trans. *Xuanhe shupu* 宣和書譜 (Catalogue of Calligraphy in the Xuanhe Era). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 81-82.

<sup>102</sup> A revised version of this section will be published in *Philosophy East and West* 68.4. For the preprint article, see Shi, Xiongbo. “The Aesthetic Concept of Yi in Chinese Calligraphic Creation.” *Philosophy East and West*, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pew.0.0127>.

Renaissance *conchetto*)”, as the act of giving relation to the sensory data, as “intention” or “will”, and as “the way someone thinks of things.”<sup>103</sup> In the area of Chinese calligraphy criticism, there are more than twenty aesthetic categories that contain the word *yi*, such as *youyi* 有意 (being intentional), *wuyi* 無意 (not being intentional), *biyi* 筆意 (the technique and spirit in brushstrokes), *xinyi* 新意 (new ideas), and *yixiang* 意象 (idea-image). Though differing markedly in their meanings, all of these compound terms in calligraphic theory are related to the artist’s or the viewer’s mind in varying degrees. This section is concerned with *yi* in the calligraphic creative process and, based on the term’s philosophical dichotomy, I divide *yi* on the part of a creative calligrapher into two types: first, the voluntative *yi*, the calligrapher’s intention or will; second, the cognitive *yi*, the idea within the artist’s mind.

### *Yi as Intention*

Referring to the artist’s intention immediately prior to or during the act of creation, the voluntative *yi* has two antithetical states in the theory of calligraphic creation— *youyi* (being intentional) or *wuyi* (not being intentional). *Youyi* means that the calligrapher is conscious of the process of artistic creation and has a comparatively clear mental conception of what comes next. Contrary to that, the approach of *wuyi* holds that calligraphers should not self-consciously predetermine or preconceive the effect of the following creation.

The distinction between *youyi* and *wuyi* is reminiscent of R. G. Collingwood’s differentiation between making and creating. For Collingwood, works of art proper, such as a painting or a piece of music, are not “made according to any preconceived plan... Yet they are made deliberately and responsibly, by people who know what they are doing, even though they do not know in advance what is going to come of it.”<sup>104</sup> Creativity is blind, Vincent Tomas suggests, and “prior to creation the creator does not

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<sup>103</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 594.

<sup>104</sup> Collingwood, R.G. *The Principles of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958. 129.

foresee what will result from it.”<sup>105</sup> Viewed in light of this nonteleological perspective on the creative process, calligraphic works resulting from calligraphers’ preconceptions (*youyi*) are not creative artworks. When a calligrapher has a mental conception in creating a work, he or she can foresee – to various degrees – what comes next: the shape of a next stroke, of the next character or even the whole column. Calligraphic creation without the subject’s preconceptions (*wuyi*) seems to correspond with what Collingwood and Tomas conceived as artistic creation, in which case the calligrapher does not have a preconceived plan before setting his or her brush to paper and cannot foresee the effect of the creation.

In describing opposing psychological tendencies of the calligrapher, *youyi* and *wuyi* are too abstract to explain the two different approaches to calligraphic creation. The immediate question is how calligraphers, intentionally or not, complete their creation. For calligraphy theorists like Chen Zhenlian and Ni Wendong, calligraphers who incline towards *youyi* stress *yi zai bi xian* 意在筆先, meaning “mental conception will come first and the brush will follow”, while calligraphers who prefer *wuyi* advocate *linzhen jueji* 臨陣決機, “making decisions and acting according to the changing circumstances”.<sup>106</sup>

The idea that mental conception precedes the brush was first proposed in the essay *Bi zhen tu* 筆陣圖 (Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush), which is attributed to Wei Shuo 衛鑠 (272-349) and later became a guiding principle in the calligraphy criticism of Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361), the most influential figure in the history of Chinese calligraphy.<sup>107</sup> Wei wrote that:

意後筆前者敗……意前筆後者勝。<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Tomas, Vincent. “Creativity in Art.” *Philosophical Review* 67.1 (1958): 4.

<sup>106</sup> Chen, Zhenlian. *Shufa meixue* 書法美學 (Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy). Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2012. 286-290; Ni, Wendong. *Shufa chuanguo daolun* 書法創作導論 (An Introduction to Calligraphic Creation). Nanchang: Jiangxi meishu chubanshe, 2012. 68-75.

<sup>107</sup> For a discussion of the term *yi* in Wang Xizhi’s texts on calligraphy, see Pan, Yungao, ed. *Hanwei liuchao shuhua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論 (Treatises on Calligraphy and Painting from the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 102-105.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

Those in whom the mental conception follows while the brush leads, they will be defeated...those in whom the mental conception precedes and the brush follows, will be victorious.<sup>109</sup>

For Wei, having conscious mental conception before writing is crucial to calligraphic success. But she did not specify the content of the calligrapher's conception or what the calligrapher is conceiving before writing. Her pupil Wang Xizhi, in the postscript to *Bizhen tu*, gave an explicit explanation of this *yi*:

夫欲書者，先乾研墨，凝神靜思，預想字形大小、偃仰、平直、振動，令筋脈相連，意在筆前，然後作字。<sup>110</sup>

Those who are going to do calligraphy usually concentrate and meditate quietly while pretending to grind the ink in order to develop in their minds the sizes, the postures, both horizontal and vertical, and the vibrations of the forms of the characters, and to make their sinew and vein (*jinmai*) linked together. [First, to make] *yi* preceding the brush, then to write the characters.<sup>111</sup>

I have previously translated the voluntative *yi* as “intention” and “mental conception”, and what Wang writes above connects the two. As Gao Jianping observed, *yi* here implies conceiving “the general strategy for realizing the intention and for moving the brush”, or intentionally conceiving “the shape, size, and directions of strokes.”<sup>112</sup> This *yi* as mental conception, as Wang stipulated, is accompanied by deep concentration and tranquil meditation. Later calligraphers and critics who insist that *youyi* or *yi* precedes the brush always stress the role of concentration and meditation,

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<sup>109</sup> Based on Richard Barnhart's translation with some modifications. See Barnhart, Richard M. “Wei Fu-Jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy.” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

<sup>110</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Hanwei liuchao shuhua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論 (Treatises on Calligraphy and Painting from the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 107.

<sup>111</sup> Based on Gao Jianping's translation. See Gao, Jianping. *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting*. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012. 308.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 308, 322.

which is drawn from Wang's statement.

Another example to explain "yi precedes the brush" is provided by the Tang calligraphy theorist Han Fangming 韓方明 (act. 799). In the last paragraph of *Shoubi yaoshuo* 授筆要說 (Essentials of Imparting Brushwork), Han wrote:

夫欲書先當想，看所書一紙之中是何詞句，言語多少，及紙色目，相稱以何等書令與書體相合，或真或行或草，與紙相當。然意在筆前，筆居心後，皆須存用筆法。想有難書之字，預於心中佈置，然後下筆……不得臨時無法，任筆所成，則非謂能解也。<sup>113</sup>

Those who are going to do calligraphy should think first. [The calligrapher] should think about the arrangement of characters on a single page as well as the type of paper. The writing script, be it regular or running or cursive, should agree with the paper. The yi (mental conception) precedes the brush and the brush comes after the mind. [Calligraphers] should pay attention to brushwork, reflecting on the difficult characters and mentally making the arrangement in advance, and then begin to write...Those who have no fa (methods and rules) in mind and allow the hand to go wherever the brush leads cannot be called talented.

The voluntative yi, in the sense of Wang Xizhi, is concerned with brushwork strategy, while for Han, it takes on more aspects: the literary content, the material, the script, etc. Conceiving these elements beforehand, the calligrapher aims to make them compatible with each other as they will eventually determine the final presentation. Han also clearly suggests that fa 法 and bifa 筆法 (techniques for using the brush) are essential for calligraphic creation. Bifa emphasises that the hand should conform to the mind and the hand should be able to control the brush; calligraphic creations in which the hand and

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<sup>113</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhong wan tang wudai shulun* 中晚唐五代書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy from the Mid- and Late Tang and the Five Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 244.

the brush lose control are inappropriate. For some contemporary calligraphy theorists, this is exactly the feature of the calligraphic creation that involves the subject's *yi* – highlighting discipline and a rational control of the whole process.<sup>114</sup>

Han lived in the mid- and late-Tang, a period that witnessed the inception of the *kuangcao* 狂草 (wild cursive script) tradition, Zhang Xu and Huaisu 懷素 (737-799) being the two pioneers. The *kuangcao* school initiated another approach to calligraphy: *wuyi* (having no intention or mental conception) prior to and during the artistic creation. The distinction between these two approaches of *youyi* and *wuyi*, as Ronald Egan observed, lies in that the former gives attention to the calligrapher's mental and emotional preparation while the latter stresses spontaneity, the wild abandon of the execution.<sup>115</sup>

The discussion of the *wuyi* approach can be introduced by some verses written by Huaisu's contemporaries:

醉來信手兩三行，醒後卻書書不得……人人欲問此中妙，懷素自言初不知……粉壁長廊數十間，興來小豁胸中氣。然後絕叫三五聲，滿壁縱橫千萬字。<sup>116</sup>

After getting drunk, Huaisu wrote freely several columns without hesitation,  
When he sobers up, however, he cannot reach the standard of the drunken  
writing...

Each of us intends to inquire about the subtlety of his calligraphy,

Huaisu said that he'd not had a clue either...

Ten rooms worth of plastered walls and porticoes

Are not enough for the spirit within his inspired breast.

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<sup>114</sup> See, Chen, Zhenlian. *Shufa meixue* 書法美學 (Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy). Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 2006. 286-90; Liu, Xiaoqing. *Shufa chuanguo shijiang* 書法創作十講 (Ten Lectures on the Creation of Calligraphy). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2013. 153-158.

<sup>115</sup> Egan, Ronald. "Ou-Yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 409-410.

<sup>116</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhong wan tang wudai shulun* 中晚唐五代書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy from the Mid- and Late Tang and the Five Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 232.

Suddenly he lets forth several loud shouts,

Then ten thousand words cover the walls, darting this way and that.<sup>117</sup>

While discussing the creativity of the wild cursive school, contemporary calligraphy theorists still cite the above verses. In doing so, I would suggest that they also sketch the main features of the *wuyi* approach to calligraphic creation. First, calligraphers who have no mental conception enjoy considerable freedom in their creation; they don't plan in advance and they often complete the work with great speed. Second, this approach stresses the spontaneous expression of the artist. The aspect of *fa* (methods and rules) that is stressed in the *youyi* approach to calligraphic creation gives way to the calligrapher's *xingqing* 性情 (feeling and disposition). In the former, the creative subject intends to bring subtlety into the work through rational control of the hand, while in the latter, the artist seems to forget his or her hand and cannot explain the completed work.

This *wuyi* approach, to some degree, accounts for the value accorded to improvisation in Chinese arts. Expressive freedom, spontaneity, invention, and creativity: these positive qualities that have been traditionally attached to improvisation in Anglophone aesthetics also manifest themselves in this *wuyi* approach.<sup>118</sup> This is a complex issue in Western philosophical aesthetics. As Aili Bresnahan observes, improvisation may involve "skill, training, planning, limitations, and forethought."<sup>119</sup> And likewise, of course, the improvisation of the *kuangcao* school has its limits and is not totally oblivious of *fa*. Though a calligrapher has great freedom in the creation of cursive script, it should be noted that this freedom comes from complete mastery of brush techniques. Furthermore, every Chinese character has a repertoire of similar cursive-script shapes, based on which viewers and connoisseurs can read and appreciate the cursive calligraphy. Had the improvisation gone beyond this repertoire, it would

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<sup>117</sup> Translation of the last four lines is based on Egan, Ronald. "Ou-Yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 410.

<sup>118</sup> For a review of improvisation in philosophical aesthetics, see Alperson, Philip. "Improvisation: Overview." In Kelly, Michael, ed. *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Vol. 3. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 439-441.

<sup>119</sup> Bresnahan, Aili. "Improvisation in the Arts." *Philosophy Compass* 10.9 (2015): 574.

have crossed the limit of calligraphic creation.

Exemplified by this feature of “skillful spontaneity”<sup>120</sup>, *wuyi* in calligraphy criticism is analogous to, or very likely has its source in, the philosophical term *wuwei* 無為 (action by non-action). Characterizations of the philosophical term *wuwei* are often applicable to *wuyi* in calligraphic practice: for example, “taking no unnatural action”<sup>121</sup>, or “a state of personal harmony in which actions flow freely and instantly from one’s spontaneous inclinations”<sup>122</sup> might be equally relevant to *wuyi* in calligraphy. *Wuwei* implies that “one do away with conscious deliberation and purposive activity altogether”<sup>123</sup> much as *wuyi* does in calligraphy. Both *wuwei* and *wuyi* suggest a spontaneous flow of proper actions.

One also needs to be aware that in some contexts *wuwei* depends on the execution of *youwei* 有為 (intentional activity). *Wuwei* actions are not completely automatic and involuntary, and as Edward Slingerland pointed out, contain “somatic elements” such as bodily training. Likewise, no calligrapher is inherently capable of performing *wuyi*. The artistic practice of all calligraphers starts with an intentional training of basic brushstroke techniques. As I mentioned above, those artists who can do cursive calligraphy in a spontaneous way need to conform to the generally accepted shapes of every Chinese character, to memorise them through repeated practice. And ideally, after persistent calligraphic training, the intentional activity becomes a somatic memory (discussed later in this chapter), on which a calligrapher’s *wuyi* actions or state of mind are based. It is thus sensible to say that the connection between *youyi* and *wuyi* are not so much two approaches than two stages. And just as *wuwei* is developed from *youwei*, *wuyi* is recognised as a higher stage that has to come from a previous stage of practice of *youyi*.

Another factor that is often believed to contribute to spontaneity in calligraphic

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<sup>120</sup> I borrow this term from Nathaniel F. Barrett, who interpreted *wuwei* as a model of spiritual equanimity based on skilful spontaneity. See Barrett, Nathaniel F. “*Wuwei* and Flow: Comparative Reflections on Spirituality, Transcendence, and Skill in the *Zhuangzi*.” *Philosophy East and West* 61.4 (2011): 679-706.

<sup>121</sup> Chan, Wing-tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969. 791.

<sup>122</sup> Slingerland, Edward. *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. 7.

<sup>123</sup> Singh, Danesh. “*Zhuangzi, Wuwei, and the Necessity of Living Naturally: A Reply to Xunzi’s Objection.*” *Asian Philosophy* 24.3 (2014): 213.



creation is wine. Both Zhang Xu and Huaisu were fond of doing calligraphy after they got drunk, which partly earned them the sobriquets of “Crazy Zhang” and “Drunken Su”. And since the Tang dynasty, quite a few texts on calligraphy have connected wine with the art. It may be seen that wine helps a mature calligrapher break away from the binding of rules, and propels the creative subject towards a *wuyi* state of mind, which is eventually conducive to the emergence of improvised calligraphic performance and work.

The eleventh-century Su Shi and his texts on calligraphy demand attention while discussing the *wuyi* approach to calligraphy. This is largely due to the fact that he clearly put forward concepts like *wuyi* and *bu jingyi* 不經意 (having no thought), and that both his calligraphy and criticism endeavour to support the ethos or aesthetic of spontaneity. Though Su is not entirely in agreement with the wildness of Crazy Zhang and Drunken Su, it is believed that his advocacy of spontaneity and self-abandonment in calligraphy “owes something to the *kuangcao* (wild cursive script) tradition.”<sup>124</sup> Talking about Wang Anshi’s 王安石 (1021-1086) calligraphy, Su wrote that Wang’s calligraphy “obtains the no-rule as the ultimate rule” (得無法之法).<sup>125</sup> Such a comment is analogous to the ideal of the *kuangcao* school: being able to ignore rules comes from a mastery of the rules. Su remarks on performing wild cursive calligraphy after getting drunk, and when sobering up being unable to reach the standard of the drunk writing; such an experience is exactly the same as Huaisu’s. Being an advocate of the *wuyi* approach to calligraphic creation, Su made it clear that a calligrapher should not privilege mental preconception and self-conscious thought. He described Wen Tong’s 文同 (1018-1079) execution of cursive script as follows: “His brush moved as fast as the wind; From the first he gave it no thought.”<sup>126</sup>

In a previous paragraph I compared the distinction between *youyi* and *wuyi* to that

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<sup>124</sup> Egan, Ronald. “Ou-Yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 409-410.

<sup>125</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 21.

<sup>126</sup> In Chinese: 落筆如風，初不經意。 Translation cited from Egan, Ronald. *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994. 278.

of “making” and “creating” in the senses that Collingwood understood them. The fact is that, in Chinese aesthetics, no one can declare that a work resulting from the subject’s intentional action or mental conception is not an artwork, and no one can deny its aesthetic value. But among Chinese critics, there is a consensus that the *wuyi* approach is superior to the *youyi*. And I would suggest that this judgement has its source in Su Shi’s *Ping caoshu* 評草書 (Remarks on Cursive Calligraphy):

書初無意於佳乃佳爾……古人雲：“匆匆不及草書。”此語非是，若匆匆不及，乃是平時亦有意於學。<sup>127</sup>

In calligraphy it is when you have no intent to produce excellent work that it turns out to be excellent...The ancients said, “I am rushed now and have no time, that is why I am using draft script.” That is wrong. To say “I am rushed now and have no time” implies that under ordinary circumstances you would still prefer to do it studiously.<sup>128</sup>

### *Yi as Idea*

All the *yi* I have discussed above – *youyi*, *wuyi*, and “*yi* precedes the brush” – are related to the action’s being intentional or not. In the aesthetics of calligraphy, *yi* has yet another dimension, which is more pervasive and more ambiguous than its voluntative dimension. Often translated as “idea”, *yi*, simply put, is what is in the calligrapher’s mind as he or she creates,<sup>129</sup> but it may be pointed out that the English word “idea” doesn’t capture the manifold content of *yi* in calligraphic creation described below. The fundamental problem resides in defining in what, precisely, this “meaning” or “idea” consists, and tracing its provenance in the field of Chinese aesthetics. These

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<sup>127</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 24.

<sup>128</sup> Translation cited from Egan, Ronald. *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1994. 279.

<sup>129</sup> Egan, Ronald. “Ou-Yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 412.

considerations form the basis of the following discussion.

Yu-Kung Kao's discussion of *yi* in literary creation is a good place to start. As discussed earlier this chapter, Kao divided his lyric aesthetics into two aspects – internalisation and symbolisation, and *yi* is an embodiment of the process of internalisation. In his seminal article “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”, Kao wrote:

Another aspect of interiority is found in the word “idea” (*i* 意). *Idea* seems to meet the demand for a versatile and adaptable term which covers the many stages of metamorphosis in the creative process...*I* is always the mediating element: it is aroused by either outside or inside stimuli, it is organized and integrated by the imagination, and it evolves into the art object...Furthermore, from the very beginning of the creative process, it is also the moldable substance of the mind. Most importantly, *i* refers also to the idea at the moment when it is ready to be presented in its final artistic form. I shall borrow the Kantian term *aesthetic idea* to differentiate *idea* at this stage, on the brink of presentation, from the more generalized *idea* that is found in the process of transformation.<sup>130</sup>

It should be pointed out that what Kao discusses above is the *yi* in literary creation, which is different from that in calligraphic creation, as the two arts have their own mediums and distinct formal languages. But in terms of the close relation between the artist's *yi* and his or her mental states, the *yi* in a calligrapher's mind is analogous to that in a writer's mind. In the above, Kao proposes that, in a creative writer's mind, this *yi* is the moldable substance that could metamorphose into an *aesthetic idea* and eventually could be lodged in the artwork. He also suggests where this *yi* comes from: the artist's perception of the external things as well as the stirring of the mind-heart (*xin* 心). I would suggest that Kao's answers also apply to the *yi* in calligraphic creation.

The first point at issue is the “moldable substance” of the artist's mind, as such a

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<sup>130</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”. In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 66.

description only points out the basic characteristics of the *yi* rather than illuminating its essence. Being an important issue in contemporary discussions on calligraphic creation, the connotations of this type of *yi* attract the attentions of many critics. In the late 1980s, Luo Hengguang offered a comprehensive definition: *Yi* is the sum total of the calligrapher's natural disposition, knowledge, skills, plus the artist's feelings and inspiration right before the calligraphic creation.<sup>131</sup> Luo's definition has been widely criticised for being too inclusive, but various definitions of *yi* since the 1990s have followed in his steps. The contemporary calligrapher Liu Xiaoqing, for example, defined *yi* as "the thought, feelings and spirit that store in the creative subject's inner life."<sup>132</sup> As far as overseas Chinese studies is concerned, quite a few sinologists, primarily those in the area of Chinese literary theory, have paid attention to *yi*. Ronald Egan, for example, believed the *yi* in the calligrapher's mind to be "thoughts and feelings,"<sup>133</sup> which is more specific than Chinese critics' definitions. Nevertheless, Egan also contends that this *yi* manifests as the "'style' in the widest and most profound sense" as it is a conviction that "the *yi* is transferred from the man himself to his calligraphy."<sup>134</sup> Egan's understanding of *yi* as "style" in this sense will not sound strange to Chinese theorists as it also draws attention to the matter of subjectivity. Likewise, art historian Peter Sturman, while discussing Northern Song calligraphy aesthetics, also connects *yi* with subjectivity by saying that "*Yi* means intent, will, reason, the cognitive processes that distinguish the individual along with his or her personal idiosyncrasies."<sup>135</sup>

The uncertainties surrounding the meaning of *yi* may originate in the ambiguous status of this mental "moldable substance" in the calligraphic creative process, and if

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<sup>131</sup> Luo, Hengguang. "Lun yi zai bi qian zhi yi" 論意在筆前之意 (On the *Yi* in 'Yi Preceding the Brush'). In *Ershi shiji shufa yanjiu congshu: pinjian pinglun pian* 20 世紀書法研究叢書：品鑒評論篇 (Studies on Calligraphy in the Twentieth Century – A Collection of Essays on Calligraphy Appreciation and Criticism). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2008. 133.

<sup>132</sup> Liu, Xiaoqing. *Shufa chuanguo shijiang* 書法創作十講 (Ten Lectures on the Creation of Calligraphy). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2013. 139.

<sup>133</sup> Egan, Ronald. "Ou-Yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 412.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Sturman, Peter. *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. 21.

we want to ascertain the ingredients of *yi*, we need to analyse with what mental activities *yi* has been linked, and with which stages *yi* is associated, in the creative process. Integrating the *yi* in Kao's "lyrical aesthetics" with other definitions of the term in calligraphy criticism, perhaps *yi* could be summarised as that it begins as perception, it is inherent in *qing* 情 (feeling and emotion), and most importantly, it is intimately bound up with the subject's calligraphic attainments and aesthetic ideal.

By calligraphic attainments I refer to the calligrapher's skills, which mainly result from long-term proper training exemplified by *linmo* 臨摹 (copying) and *dutie* 讀帖 (studying and contemplating masterworks) as discussed in Chapter Three. Unlike a painter who can represent the external world, a calligrapher, as Lothar Ledderose observed, "has to operate within a close system of forms"<sup>136</sup>, which means that every practitioner of this art – beginners as well as master calligraphers – trains by repetitive imitation. The importance of *linmo* lies in that a calligrapher develops certain degrees of somatic awareness while endeavouring to imitate the brushstrokes, the twists and turns, the tardiness or the harshness (*jise* 疾澀) in the model. Such somatic awareness or knowledge underlies the *wuyi* actions discussed above; it also serves, in every calligraphic performance, as the agent which actualises the cognitive *yi* or the "idea" in the calligrapher's mind.

If *linmo* highlights the calligrapher's physical act, *dutie* emphasises contemplative act. *Du*, literally "reading", is used here in a metaphorical sense: just as one needs to comprehend words' meanings or analyse compositional structures to understand a piece of writing, one also must closely study the brushstrokes and the variations of the ink colours in order to grasp the beauty of the forms and the intent behind the calligraphic traces. *Dutie*, as a mode of calligraphic training, generates *yi*.

As noted above, *yi*, occurring in the calligrapher's mind, eventually will flow into his or her work, and as a result, calligraphy theory has it that viewers can grasp the *yi* in other people's calligraphic works. Since the Six Dynasties (222-589), historians and

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<sup>136</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979. 33.

critics of this art have emphasised capturing *yi*. Yuan Ang 袁昂 (461-540) of the Southern Liang claimed that he detected twelve types of wondrous *yi* in Zhong Hui's calligraphy.<sup>137</sup> Yu Shinan 虞世南 (558-638) of the early Tang belittled those who cannot grasp *yi*, because without *yi* every single dot and stroke in their calligraphy looks awkward.<sup>138</sup> Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (act. 713-741) stated that we are unable to grasp fully all the deep *yi* (*shenyi* 深意) in the ancient masters' works.<sup>139</sup> Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) of the Northern Song, as an admirer and follower of Li Yong's 李邕 (675-747) calligraphy, proudly said that he obtained the *yi* in Li's calligraphy and forgot the calligraphic form.<sup>140</sup> There is no doubt that *yi* is a key term in calligraphic appreciation, and that the *yi* a calligrapher captures in the ancient master's works, along with his or her calligraphic skills, moulds the artist's aesthetic ideal, and becomes a constituent of the subject's *yi* in the creative process.

*Yi* begins as a calligrapher's perception of things. The aesthetic term *guanwu quxiang* 觀物取象 (literally meaning "examining the things and capturing their image") could be employed here to explore this mental aspect, as it demonstrates that it is the image of things rather than the things themselves that can be employed by a Chinese artist. The artist's action of *guan* 觀 (see, view, observe) brings about the image of the things in the mind. And it should be noted that this process of capturing the image of things often necessitates grasping the reality or spirit of them, in which the artist's cognition would be involved, and on which calligraphy's potential to replicate the natural transformation is based. In this sense, the mental image of a thing encompasses the cognitive *yi* of the artist. Stephen Owen defined *yi* in Chinese poetics as "an interpretive relation of sensory data,"<sup>141</sup> which I think also applies to calligraphy

<sup>137</sup> In Chinese: 鐘會書字十二種意，意外殊妙，實亦多奇。Pan, Yungao, ed. *Hanwei liuchao shuhua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論 (Treatises on Calligraphy and Painting from the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 204.

<sup>138</sup> In Chinese: 夫未解書意者，一點一畫皆求象本，乃轉自取拙，豈成書邪。Pan, Yungao, ed. *Chu Tang shu lun* 初唐書論 (Early Tang Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 28.

<sup>139</sup> In Chinese: 評先賢之書，必不能盡其深意。Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhang Huaiguan shu lun* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan's Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 17.

<sup>140</sup> In Chinese: 余雖因邕書得筆法，然為字絕不相類，豈得其意而忘其形者邪？Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 5.

<sup>141</sup> Owen, Stephen. *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought*. Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992. 594.

criticism. Nevertheless, a calligrapher's act of giving relation to his or her sensory data is different from that of a poet, as these two arts employ different mediums – the former exploits the physical presence of Chinese characters while the latter uses the semantic aspect of them.

In calligraphic creation, *yi* is inherent in the *qing* (feeling or emotion) of the artist. *Qing* and *yi* are etymologically associated. In the *Shuowen* Lexicon, *yi* is explained as *zhi* 志, meaning what's in the mind and where the mind goes, and meanwhile, *zhi* is interlinked with *qing* within certain contexts. Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648), for example, commented on the “six emotions” or the “six directions” (*liu zhi* 六志) in *Zuozhuan* as follows: “These six ‘*zhi*-directions’ are identified as the six *qing* in the *Book of Rites*. Within oneself, they are called *qing*; when the *qing* are activated they are called *zhi*. *Qing* and *zhi* are one.”<sup>142</sup> Kong's annotation has been cited by literary theorists like Zhu Ziqing 朱自清 (1898-1948) to demonstrate that the distinction between the once two independent Chinese poetic traditions – “poetry as an articulation of what is on the mind” (*shi yanzhi* 詩言志) and “poetry as an expression of emotion” (*shi yuanqing* 詩緣情) – is not clear-cut in texts addressing poetry dating from the Tang Dynasty.<sup>143</sup> The expression of emotion is therefore not incompatible with the articulation of what is on the artist's mind. For some Chinese aestheticians, the stirring of *qing* is thus accompanied with *yi*, and the artist's *yi* is integrated with *qing*.<sup>144</sup>

I have analysed so far this “moldable substance”, the formless *yi* in the sense Kao intends, explaining why it combines the ingredients of calligraphic attainments, the artist's perception of things, and his or her feelings. For Kao, this formless *yi* would transform into a special type of *yi* that could be presented in its final artistic form.”<sup>145</sup> It's hard to explain how this transformation occurs. Obviously, the calligrapher's

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<sup>142</sup> In Chinese: 此六志禮記謂之六情，在己為情，情動為志，情志一也。 Translation cited from Chan, Alan. “Do Sages Have Emotions?” In Shen, Vincent, and Kwong-loi Shun, eds. *Confucian Ethics in Retrospect and Prospect*. Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2008. 121-122.

<sup>143</sup> Zhu, Ziqing. *Zhu ziqing shuo shi* 朱自清說詩 (Zhu Ziqing on Poetry). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998. 35-38.

<sup>144</sup> For a close analysis of the relation between *qing* and *yi*, see Zhu, Zhirong. *Zhongguo shenmei lilun* 中國審美理論 (Chinese Aesthetic Theories). Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005. 156-157.

<sup>145</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”. In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 66.

thinking and imagination play an important role. Kao compared this special type of *yi* with Kant's *aesthetic idea*, but I would argue that the Chinese aesthetic term *yixiang* (idea-image) would be the more accurate term here. And the fact is, in contemporary Chinese aesthetic discussions, *yixiang* and *aesthetic idea* do have something in common. *Yixiang* results from the artist's thought or imagination which processes the formless ideas in the artist's mind, and the *aesthetic idea*, as Kant described it, "is a representation of the imagination, allied with a given concept."<sup>146</sup> The emergence of *yixiang*, the idea-image in the calligrapher's mind, marks the completion of the process of internalisation in calligraphic creation.

#### 4.5 *Shou* and the bodily movement

The artist's bodily movement is the most important aspect in calligraphic creation; all of the mental contents – the calligrapher's perception, emotion, intention, and his or her idea prior to and during the creative process – can only be manifested through the physical act, the movement of the brush. As noted above, this is markedly different from poetic creation wherein the aesthetic ideas or verses lingering in the poet's mind could be identical to the poem written on paper. For calligraphic creation, like painting and other "material" arts, the envisaging of a brushstroke in the artist's mind only makes sense after its materialisation.

This is precisely why scholars discussing calligraphic creation tend to focus on the movement of the body. Yu-Kung Kao, for example, wrote that "calligraphy concentrates on the phase of execution, which is the materialization of the physical power of the artist."<sup>147</sup> For the German sinologist Mathias Obert, "Brush writing is based on a methodic elaboration of the writer's *ways of moving his hand* which in turn handles the ink brush," and the creation of calligraphy "has been conceived of as a

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<sup>146</sup> Kant, Immanuel; James Creed Meredith, trans. *Critique of Judgement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 145.

<sup>147</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. "Chinese Lyric Aesthetics". In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 80.



temporal act involving a specific capacity of the body to regulate the pace of its movements.”<sup>148</sup> This somatic aspect of calligraphy, according to Richard Shusterman, renders it a typical non-Western example of “somaesthetics”. The body, within the theoretical framework of Shusterman’s somaesthetics, projects as the locus of sensory appreciation and creative self-expression.<sup>149</sup> Within the context of Chinese aesthetics, both the creation and the appreciation of works of calligraphy are predicated on a particular somatic knowledge of the art. Focusing on the bodily movement of the calligrapher, my discussion below elaborates on a somaesthetics of Chinese ink brush writing.

#### 4.5.1 Bodily movement and the embodied lines

Previous sections disentangled the *xin* in calligraphic creation, differentiating the term’s several dimensions as perception, emotion and intention. By comparison, *shou* refers simply to the artist’s hand. This, however, does not mean that the phase of execution only involves the movement of the hand. In calligraphic creation, as Obert observed, “it is always the *whole body* engaging in the act of writing, not solely the hand.”<sup>150</sup> Nevertheless, there are certainly reasons for the practitioner’s hand becoming an epitome of the whole bodily movement. For one, it is exactly through the hand’s control of the brush that a calligrapher realises his or her creation. For another, the phase of bodily execution in any graphic art inevitably entails skills and craftsmanship, and the Chinese counterpart for “skill” – *shouyi* 手藝 – literally means the “skill of the hand”. This also explains why the term *shou* is often metaphorically combined with other terms – such as *miao-shou* 妙手 (literally meaning “subtle hand”) or “highly skilled” – to

<sup>148</sup> Obert, Mathias. “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 12.4 (2013): 533.

<sup>149</sup> Richard Shusterman defined somaesthetics as “the critical, meliorative study of the experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (*aisthesis*) and creative self-fashioning.” see Shusterman, Richard. “Somaesthetics: A Disciplinary Proposal.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57.3 (1999): 299-313. See also: Shusterman, Richard. “Body and the Arts: The Need for Somaesthetics.” *Diogenes* 59.1-2 (2012): 7-20. For his discussion of Eastern philosophy and somaesthetics, see Shusterman, Richard. “Asian *Ars Erotica* and the Question of Sexual Aesthetics.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65.1 (2007): 55-68.

<sup>150</sup> Obert, Mathias. “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 12.4 (2013): 533.

delineate the efficacy of works of calligraphy, painting, and even poetry.

Concerning the calligrapher's whole body that participates in calligraphic creation, theoretical texts that provide vivid descriptions abound in calligraphy criticism. Cheng Yaotian 程瑤田 (1725-1814) of the Qing dynasty wrote that:

書成於筆，筆運於指，指運於腕，腕運於肘，肘運于肩。肩也，肘也，腕也，指也，皆運於其右體者也，而右體則運於其左體。左右體者，體之運於上者也，而上體則運於其下體，下體者，兩足也……下體實矣，而後能運上體之虛。<sup>151</sup>

Calligraphy is achieved by means of the brush. The brush is controlled by the fingers, fingers by the wrist, wrist by the elbow, and elbow by the shoulder. The shoulder, elbow, wrist and fingers are all regulated by the right side of the body, which is balanced by the body's left side. The left and the right side of the body, which constitute the upper part, are supported by the two feet or the body's lower part...Only after the feet rest steadily and firmly, can the upper part of the body operate.

A salient point Cheng raises is that the various bodily parts – the fingers, wrist, elbow, and shoulder – do not independently function in calligraphic creation. The linkage between these bodily parts can be appreciated on one hand by their relative distances away from the writing brush, and on the other hand by the natural somakinetics. The movement of the hand and the fingers inevitably involves that of the wrist, and the wrist's range of motion is physically restrained by the elbow. In general, calligraphers in China control the brush with the right hand, which is part of the right side and by extension the upper part of the body. In accordance with Cheng's ideas, the upper body is set in a space or state of *xu* 虛 (empty or void), and for this empty upper

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<sup>151</sup> Cheng, Yaotian. *Cheng Yaotian quanji* 程瑤田全集 (A Complete Collection of Cheng Yaotian). Vol. 3. Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2008. 265.

body to exert force that initiates and propels the act of writing, one has to make sure the lower part of his body and feet setting are in a state of *shi* 實 (solid), the opposite of *xu* in Chinese philosophical and aesthetic discourses.<sup>152</sup> As a result, the fingers that actually control the brush are related to the feet resting on the ground. This is the second point that needs to be noted about the above passage.

For general viewers of the calligraphic performance, the direct effect of the lower part of the body on the creation is hard to observe. For the practitioner of the art, however, the gesture of the whole body undoubtedly affects the actual movement of the hand that controls the brush. In fact, calligraphers often adopt appropriate bodily postures with regard to specific calligraphic situations, such as the size of the intended calligraphic work. Creating a small-sized work, calligraphers normally take a sitting posture with elbows resting on a writing table. While in the context of producing large works, it is necessary for calligraphers to maintain a standing posture, in which case the artist's upper body (including the arm, elbow and hand) is suspended in the air. It's not hard to imagine that these two calligraphic situations present different kinetic characteristics.

The calligraphic concept of *shenfa* 身法, literally meaning “the method of body”, has much explanatory power here, as it calls attention to the right posture of sitting or standing which is suitable for moving the brush, and the proper coordination between the movements of the shoulder, elbow, wrist and fingers. In the view of the Qing dynasty calligrapher and art critic Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775-1855), the *shenfa* in calligraphy has something in common with that in martial arts:

學書如學拳，學拳者身法、步法、手法……必極筋所能至……書家自運之道，亦如是矣。<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of *xu* and *shi* in Chinese art theory, see Kuo, Jason C. “Emptiness-Substance: *Xushi*”. In Powers, Martin, and Katherine Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2016. 329-348.

<sup>153</sup> Bao, Shichen; Zhu Jia, comm. *Yizhou shuangji shuzheng* 藝舟雙楫疏證 (Annotations to the Oars of the Boat of Art). Taipei: Huacheng shuju, 1980. 80-81.

Practising calligraphy is just like practising boxing. The boxing practitioner, while implementing the techniques for moving the body, the feet and the hands, extends his or her sinews to the extreme...The way a calligrapher moves his or her own body (*zi yun*) is just like this.

Bao's analogy between the *shenfa* in calligraphy and that in boxing (*quan* 拳) has its source in his emphasis on the involvement of the practitioner's whole body in calligraphic creation. Several times in his *Oars of the Boat of Art*, he made it clear that calligraphers should convey their whole physical potency to the tip of the brush and draw on the full strength of their body to produce a dot or a stroke as thin as a hair.<sup>154</sup> Apparently, Bao was aware of the difference between the two types of *shenfa*, or methods of using the body, when he described the calligraphic bodily movement as *ziyun* 自運 (self-operation) as opposed to the martial artist's somatic movement which always entails the interpretation of "the opponent's form and its corresponding energetic trajectory."<sup>155</sup>

The proposition that a single stroke should be sent off with the full strength of one's body does not tell us much about the somatic strategy in calligraphic creation.<sup>156</sup> The somatic strategy here, or the "efficacious disposition" in the sense used by Francois Jullien, primarily concerns the handling of the brush.<sup>157</sup> The brush here constitutes the medium between the calligrapher's bodily movement and the ink traces on the paper. As a result, the specific ways a calligrapher wields the brush becomes a determining factor behind the artistic quality and the styles of his or her work, which explains why critics of this art since the Tang dynasty have shown a growing preference for discussing brush techniques.

The techniques for using the brush consist of nothing less than two categories:

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<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 4, 145.

<sup>155</sup> Mullis, Eric. "Martial Somaesthetics." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 47.3 (2013): 100.

<sup>156</sup> This proposition is first raised in Lady Wei's *Bizhen tu*. She wrote that, "When writing, dots, verticals, horizontals, slices, waves, hooks, and curves must all be sent off with the full strength of one's body." Barnhart, Richard M. "Wei Fu-Jen's Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy." *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

<sup>157</sup> Jullien, Francois. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 108.

*zhibi fa* 執筆法 (methods of grasping the brush) and *yunbi fa* 運筆法 (methods of moving the brush). Grasping or holding the brush seems to be an initial simple step, but it has long been regarded as the key to calligraphic success. Thus, there is no lack of calligraphers who carefully avoid mentioning their ways of handling the brush. Lin Yun 林蘊 (fl. 860) of the Tang dynasty recorded that the then well-known scholar-calligrapher Lu Zhao 盧肇 (fl. 843) had imparted to him the brush-handling method of *bo-deng* 撥鐙 (literally meaning “touching the stirrup”), and Lu warned him not to spread this method indiscriminately.<sup>158</sup>

Methods of holding the brush vary, but all of the methods have in common the need to employ certain fingers in grasping the brush. This leads to a general principle behind the appropriate methods: the disposition of the fingers along the brush should be conducive to the hand’s gathering and distributing of the bodily strength. In *Shoubi yaoshuo*, Han Fangming made a comparison between the two methods of *dangou* 單鉤 (single-hook) and *shuanggou* 雙鉤 (double-hook):

夫書之妙在於執管，既以雙指苞管，亦當五指共執，其要實指虛掌……世俗皆以單指苞之，則力不足而無神氣。<sup>159</sup>

A subtlety of calligraphy lies in the grasping of the brush. [When one] holds the brush with the second and the middle finger hooking the brush, he or she certainly has to employ the five fingers. The point is to make the fingers firm and the palm hollow or open...It is a custom that people hold the brush with only the forefinger hooking the brush, which will result in a lack of physical strength and spirit vitality.

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<sup>158</sup> Lin, Yun. *Bodeng xu* 撥鐙序 (A Narration of *bodeng*). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhong wan tang wudai shulun* 中晚唐五代書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy during the Mid- and Late Tang and the Five Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 246-247.

<sup>159</sup> Han, Fangming. *Shoubi yaoshuo* 授筆要說 (Essentials of Imparting Brushwork). In Pan Yungao, ed. *Zhong wan tang wudai shulun* 中晚唐五代書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy from the Mid- and Late Tang and the Five Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 240.

The “double-hook method” or the “five finger method” (Fig. 4-3) has been acclaimed by many famous calligraphers as the most efficacious way of brush-holding.<sup>160</sup> The action of each of the five fingers in this method has been designated a specific term: *ye* 擗 stipulates that the thumb presses the inner side of the brush outward, *ya* 押 describes the forefinger’s gesture of clinging to the outer side of the brush, *gou* 鉤 refers to the middle finger’s hooking, *ge* 格 (resisting) and *di* 抵 (support) specify the ways of exerting strength for the fourth and little finger respectively. As Chiang Yee pointed out, in this way all the five fingers play their part:

The thumb and second finger are the most important members, receiving the strength of the wrist and arm and regulating the pressure of the stroke. The middle and fourth fingers do the work of turning and moving, for the middle finger can twist the handle downwards or to the right, while the fourth lifts it upwards or to the left...The little finger plays the part of conductor...The fingers must all co-operate.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Shen Yinmo made a very detailed record of the “five finger method”. He believed it to be the only correct way to hold the brush. Shen, Yinmo. *Xueshu youfa* 學書有法 (Rules for Learning Calligraphy). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006. 12-18.

<sup>161</sup> Chiang, Yee. *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973. 139.

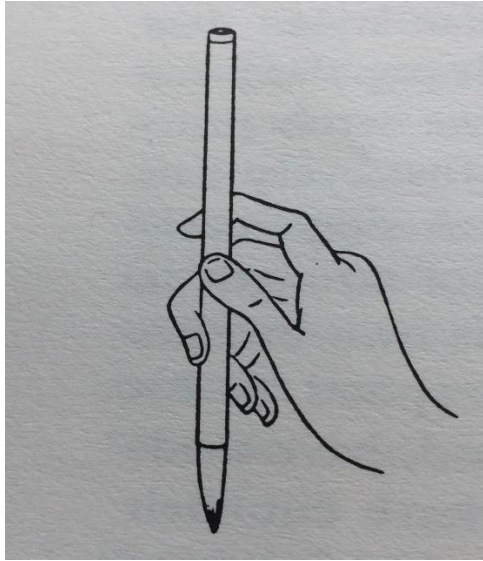


Fig. 4-3, Double-hook, or Five-finger Method of Brush-holding. From Chiang, Yee. *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetics and Techniques*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973. 138.

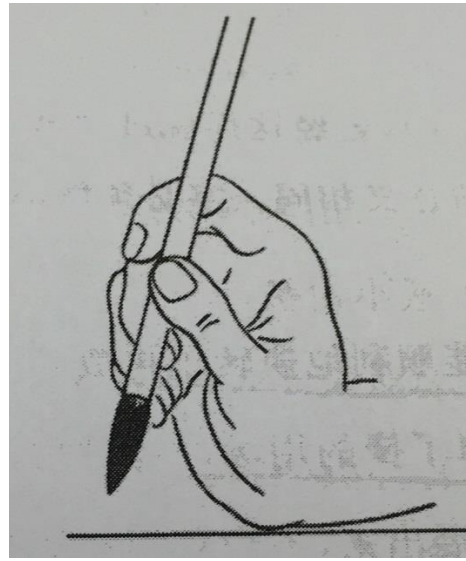


Fig. 4-4, Sing-hook Method. From Shen, Yinmo. *Xueshu youfa* 學書有法 (Rules for Learning Calligraphy). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006. 21.

Chiang makes it clear that the appropriate positioning of the fingers can respond effectively to the movements of wrist or arm, which would eventually flow into the brushstrokes via the medium of the brush. This also explains why Han Fangming would denounce the single-hook method (Fig. 4-4) in which only the thumb and the forefinger grasp the brush and the fingers are unable to wield the brush flexibly. The result is that it's hard for the fingers to receive the strength of wrist and arm, and for Han a lack of somatic strength that actuates the brush eventually leads to a lack of spirit in the work. The physical strength in wielding the brush is thereupon related to the formal strength or the aesthetic implication of the calligraphic lines. Moreover, in Chinese artistic terminology, the strength, be it physical or aesthetic, is described by the same concept *li* 力 (strength or power).

The interrelation between physical strength and the formal force is better manifested in *yunbi* or the “brush movement”, and *zhibi* (grasping the brush) could be regarded as a preparation for it. To be more specific, *yunbi* refers to efficacious methods

for moving the brush or for producing calligraphic lines, which, for calligraphy theorists like Chiang Yee and Qiu Zhenzhong, generates the aesthetics of this art.<sup>162</sup>

The importance of *yunbi* in calligraphic practice means that every line or brushstroke should be treated carefully and artistically. Though brush treatment varies in the case of different kinds of strokes, the execution of all lines in calligraphy follows three steps: the beginning, the continuation, and the ending. The transition between the three phases is accompanied with a turning of the brush tip. In the words of Jiang Kui, “each dot and each line contains three turns. Each *bo* and each *fu* has three turning points.”<sup>163</sup> The meaning of this is illustrated in Fig. 4-5. The brush movement of all the three strokes – vertical stroke on the left, horizontal stroke in the centre and the left downward stroke on the right – undergoes three courses or turnings: *a* means the beginning, *b* the continuation, *c* the ending. For a seemingly geometrical vertical line, a calligrapher moves the brush upwards (*a*), then turns the direction of the movement to make the brush walk down (*b*), and lastly completes the line with a backward force (*c*). The execution of a horizontal line, a left downward line and all other types of lines has to comply with such a method of three turnings. This method is more famously expressed by Mi Fu’s succinct answer to Zhai Qinian’s question of what calligraphy should be like – “whatever hangs down must turn upward; wherever one goes, one must turn back.”<sup>164</sup> The point is, as John Hay wrote, “the bone tip in calligraphy should not be overmanifested at the surface”, as “the brush-core tip are a store and source of energy.”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Chiang, Yee. *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973. 144. Qiu, Zhenzhong. *Shufa de xingtai yu chanshi* 書法的形態與闡釋 (Calligraphic Form and Its Explanations). Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1993. 31.

<sup>163</sup> In Chinese: 一點一劃，皆有三轉，一波一拂，皆有三折。Translation based on Chang, Ch’ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 23. As Chang explains in the book’s glossary, *bo* refers to “a wavy line moving more horizontally than vertically,” and *fu* to a “curving line moving from the upper left to the lower right.”

<sup>164</sup> In Chinese: 無垂不縮，無往不收。Translation cited from Chang, Ch’ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 19.

<sup>165</sup> Hay, John. “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 89.



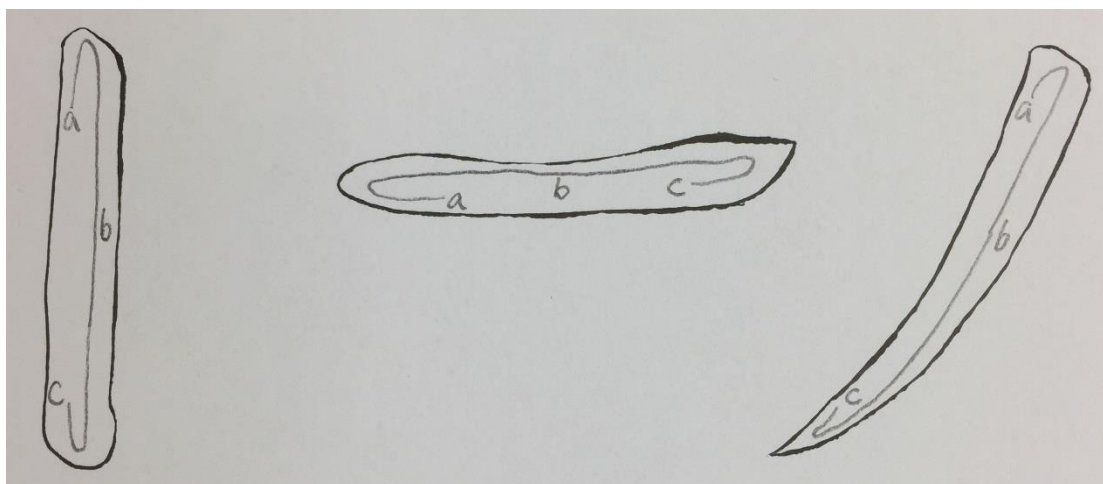


Fig. 4-5, Method of Three Turnings.

Such a prescriptive method for using the brush *is* the aesthetics or somaesthetics of Chinese calligraphy at the most practical level, for it is not only a prescription for beautiful and powerful lines but a prescription for *shenfa* or the “efficacious dispositions of the hand and body.”<sup>166</sup> As Jullien observed, a comprehensive strategy for *shenfa* in Chinese calligraphy is formulated as early as the second-century in Cai Yong’s *Jiu shi* 九勢 (Nine Types of *Shi*). Several techniques laid down by Cai are as follows:

轉筆，宜左右回顧，無使節目孤露；  
 藏鋒，點畫出入之跡，欲左先右，至回左亦爾；  
 藏頭，圓筆屬紙，令筆心常在點畫中行；  
 護尾，畫點勢盡，力收之。<sup>167</sup>

Twirling the tip of the brush in a rounded movement. One should be attentive to the smooth joint between two strokes and avoid jagged angles.

<sup>166</sup> Jullien, Francois. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 108.

<sup>167</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties) Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 6-7.

Hiding the tip. One should make an initial movement in the direction opposite that in which the brush must travel, both at the beginning and at the completion of the ideogram.

Hiding the head. One manipulates the brush to force the tip making contact with the paper to remain constantly at the center of the stroke.

Protecting the tail. One completes the figure with a forceful backward flourish.<sup>168</sup>

The above four techniques could further explain the Method of Three Turnings (Fig. 4-5): the head (beginning) and the tail (end) of a calligraphic line should be carefully treated by means of “hiding the tip” of the brush, and twirling the tip ensures the natural and smooth transition between successive lines. What I intend to emphasise is that a substantial number of texts in Chinese art criticism, like the above cited, is both a guide to the artistically appropriate lines and to the calligrapher’s physical actions. Terms like “hiding the tip” and “protecting the tail”, as Obert observed, “ultimately refer to something happening *within body movement* itself, that is, to a certain modification of the way in which the movement is performed.”<sup>169</sup>

In this sense, *yunbi* is in fact concerned with the materialisation or physical realisation of quality lines. A calligrapher’s imitating or copying of famous works (or *linmo* as discussed in Chapter Three) should really be understood as somatic training, through which the artist’s body forms a memory for individual strokes and character structures. This is analogous to a kungfu practitioner’s mastering of basic martial techniques and routines, which, as Eric Mullis observed, requires the practitioner “develop a robust awareness of his or her energetic kinesphere, that is, the space through which the body moves.”<sup>170</sup> A martial practitioner’s sense of “the energetic pathways that the limbs and body can efficiently move through”, as Eric implied, is a requisite

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<sup>168</sup> Based on Francois Jullien’s translation with modifications. Jullien, Francois. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 108-109.

<sup>169</sup> Obert, Mathias. “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 12.4 (2013): 535.

<sup>170</sup> Mullis, Eric C. “Martial Somaesthetics.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 47.3 (2013): 103.

for powerful movement sequences that is necessary for physical combat. While for calligraphy, as I mentioned earlier, it is an art about *ziyun* or “self-operation” whose sole opponent is the artist him/herself. In calligraphic creation, the artist’s bodily memory of particular lines stimulates particular movements which is then embodied in the spontaneous linear progression. This could also explain why a calligrapher excels at one particular writing script rather than another, for it takes time to form a bodily memory for a certain script, and having no bodily memory for a calligraphic script simply means that the calligrapher’s body is not familiar with the *yunbi* (brush movement) used and the linear feature manifested in this particular script.

#### 4.5.2 Linear progression

The above discussion on *yunbi* focuses on the execution of a single stroke, however, a calligraphic work, as pointed out in the second chapter, generally consists of many lines and more than one character. And the calligraphic creative process could be atomised as the realisation of the first stroke, followed by the second, the third, up until the last line of the whole work. This process could also be briefly characterised as “linear progression”. That being said, I would like to add that the quality of individual lines is still important, as they are the cornerstone of this art. The first line, especially, is believed to set the tone for the whole work, and the second and the successive lines should be executed in a way that echoes to it. As Sun Guoting put it: “A single dot determines the outline of a whole character; a single character sets the standard for a whole piece.”<sup>171</sup>

But if we want to understand the calligraphic creative process per se – that is, how a work comes into being, we have to explore the progression of lines. The linear progression has two layers of meanings: it refers to the succession of lines that are arranged in a certain way on the surface of, for example, writing paper; it also refers to

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<sup>171</sup> In Chinese: 一點成一字之規，一字乃終篇之準。Translation cited from Chang, Ch’ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 14.

a sequence of bodily movements that bring about the successive lines.

The first level of meaning is in fact about the spatiality of this art. In painting, as Albert Gleizes pointed out, “to establish pictorial space, we must have recourse to tactile and motor sensations”<sup>172</sup>, which is manifested in the handling of the forms of the depicted subject-matter. This is also applicable to space in Chinese calligraphy; only the subject matter here involves solely lines, and the tactile perceptions solely *fenbu* 分布 or “the structure of the writing”. Synonymous with *fenbu* in calligraphy criticism, *bubai* 布白 – literally meaning “the arrangement of the white” – is a more figurative usage where *bai* means both the colour of white and the state of being empty or void (*xu*). Calligraphic creation is thus the artist’s arrangement of lines in the originally formless void, in an empty space. *Bubai*, as the Qing dynasty scholar-artist Jiang He 蔣和 described, has three levels:

字中之布白，逐字之布白，行間之布白。<sup>173</sup>

The structure of a single character; the positioning of characters; and the arrangement of columns of characters.

The last section has discussed the practical aesthetics of a line; *bubai* here is concerned with the aesthetics of space, the efficacious rhythmic placement of successive lines. Such a spatial aesthetic is based largely on the Chinese critics’ and calligraphers’ careful attention to the dynamism between the lines in every calligraphic work and its creation. Artistic concepts abound in the discourses on this issue, and a frequently mentioned term is *xiangbei* 向背, literally meaning “face to face and back to back”. As Jiang Kui explained:

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<sup>172</sup> Harrison, Charles, and Paul Wood, eds. *Art in Theory 1900-2000: An Anthology of Ideas*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002. 195.

<sup>173</sup> Mao, Wanbao, and Huang Jun, eds. *Zhongguo gudai shulun leibian* 中國古代書論類編 (Classified Collection of Classical Chinese Texts on Calligraphy). Heifei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009.

向背者，如人之顧盼指畫，相揖相背。發於左者應於右，起於上者伏於下。大要點畫之間，施設各有情理。<sup>174</sup>

Face to face and back to back is like people looking at, gesturing, saluting, and turning their backs on each other. When something is started on the left, there must be a response on the right; when something begins at the top, there must be a corresponding element below. Generally speaking, dots and lines must be structured and arranged with a rationale that applies to every one of them.<sup>175</sup>

Just as “the method of three turnings” in the execution of a single stroke stipulates both the desirable line and the corresponding bodily movement, this spatial principle of *xiangbei* also refers to these two aspects. That is to say, the contrast and correlation between the lines, and hence the tension or force manifested in a static work, result from corresponding somatic movements. Calligraphic writing, as Jullien pointed out, “exemplifies the dynamism at two levels: the level of the gestures creating the form as well as that of the form that thereby becomes legible on the paper.”<sup>176</sup> All of these aspects involving the dynamism in calligraphic creation, in fact, could be epitomised by the aesthetic concept of *shi* 勢, which has been variously translated as “force-form”, “impulse and *gestalt*”, “dynamic configuration”, “propensity” etc.<sup>177</sup> For John Hay, *shi* “is the form of becoming, process and, by extension, movement.”<sup>178</sup> *Shi*, for Obert, “at the same time means the dynamic tendency of a movement, as well as the fixed

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<sup>174</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty texts on calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 255.

<sup>175</sup> Chang, Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 26.

<sup>176</sup> Jullien, Francois. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995. 133.

<sup>177</sup> For discussions of *shi* in calligraphy, see Kao, Yu-Kung. “Chinese Lyric Aesthetics”. In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991; Hay, John. “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983; Obert, Mathias. “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 12.4 (2013): 523-543; Jullien, Francois. *The Propensity of Things: Toward a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books, 1995; Gao, Jianping. *The Expressive Act in Chinese Art: From Calligraphy to Painting*. Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2012.

<sup>178</sup> Hay, John. “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 102.

*gestalt*.”<sup>179</sup> In this sense, *xiangbei* – a tactic for producing a vigorous ideogram – is a specific method calligraphers could employ to express *shi*.

As the arrangement of lines or *bubai* is not only about the structure of a single ideogram, it is natural to say that calligraphic *shi* should not only be achieved in individual characters; the linkage between the ideograms and the correlation between the columns should also express a dynamic continuity. What has to be pointed out is that the dynamic configuration in actual operation is not a singular one, or, has no constant model. In fact, one of the differences among the calligraphic scripts lies exactly in the various degrees of linkage between the lines. The regular script and the wild cursive script locate at the two ends of this spectrum; the characters and strokes in the former are separated, while in the latter the strokes of a whole column of characters could be all connected as one single progressive line. The foremost principle in writing a specific script is to conform to the rules established by the tradition of that script, thus a calligrapher’s arrangement of the lines and characters, his or her expression of *shi*, varies with the script being chosen.

While discussing the “propensity for linking” or the *shi* between the lines, both Jullien and Obert emphasised the somatic movement as the initiator. I would like to stress that the calligrapher’s cognition also plays a role in the creation of the dynamic configuration. For example, calligraphers often need to review or evaluate the overall tendency of the previous columns before initiating a new column of characters, ensuring that what’s going to come resonates with what has already been created. A calligraphic creation, though, relies more on the artist’s somatic memory, but his or her arrangement of the given space, at some point during the creative process, mostly entails conscious mental judgement.

The progression of lines that characterises calligraphic creation implies another more profound feature of this art – temporality. A most obvious example is that beginners – and professionals as well – of this art are asked to abide by the *bishun* 筆

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<sup>179</sup> Obert, Mathias. “Chinese Ink Brush Writing, Body Mimesis, and Responsiveness.” *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* 12.4 (2013): 535.

順 (the sequence of strokes) in the execution of every character. In calligraphy, what matters is not only presenting a character correctly with all its strokes, but presenting all the strokes in the correct sequence. Furthermore, once a line is made by the brush and set on the paper, the calligrapher is forbidden to go back and modify it. This is reminiscent of the performance of dancers and martial practitioners, where all the bodily movements must be continuous and uninterrupted, and where going back to a martial or dance routine is impossible. A line, a routine, once done, belongs to that particular space and time in which the performer made it. The difference lies in that calligraphers leave the viewers lines – the imprint of their bodily movements – after the end of the performance. And gazing into the continuous lines left by a calligraphic performance within a certain time and space, viewers from a later time can trace and reconstruct the movements of that calligrapher's hand. In the sixth chapter on calligraphic appreciation, I will return to this point.

## Conclusion

The previous sections have dealt with the mental and physical activities in calligraphic creation; the two aspects, along with the natural world in which artists reside, constitute the tripartite scheme that could be employed to analyse various artistic activities in China. It is no doubt that the three aspects in different Chinese arts present distinct interactions. In terms of the relation between nature and art, for example, Chinese painting and literature could depict natural things directly while a calligrapher can only draw inspiration from the broad types of natural rhythms and simulates specific rhythms using specific linear forms. Compared to literary creation that gives attention to the phase of composition, painting and calligraphy put more emphasis on the phase of physical realisation. And although both painting and calligraphy stress brushwork and mental arrangement, the latter becomes a unique art in China for its linearity, for its being able to present the sequence of the artist's movements that are temporally identifiable.

It is my point that both *xin* and *shou*, the various aspects of mind and the bodily movements, play a significant part in calligraphic creation, and more importantly, the two aspects should not be understood as being insulated from each other; they intermingle in calligraphic creation. Roger Ames' description of the "psychosomatic merge" in the dance and the *kata* experience that "there seems to be a point at which the physical and the conscious become inseparably integrated" is also applicable to calligraphic experience,<sup>180</sup> in which it is actually impossible to separate, for example, the physical realisation of lines and the artist's *qing* (emotion) and *yi* (intention) accompanying bodily movements.

This psychosomatic feature of calligraphic creation is suggested by the pervasive artistic terms in calligraphy criticism that bind together *xin* and *shou*, such as *xin shou shuang chang* 心手雙暢 (mind and hand acting in harmony), *xin wu wan cong* 心悟腕从 (the mind is alert and the wrist complied), and *miao zai xin shou* 妙在心手 (the subtlety lies in mind and hand). Terms like this indicate that successful calligraphic creation or creativity lies in the coordination, the configural congruity, between the mind and the body. There has to exist mutual trust between the mental and the physical: on one hand is *xin bu yi shou* 心不疑手 (the mind is not suspicious of hand), on the other is *shou yi xin hui* 手以心麾 (the hand is commanded by the mind). In a fundamental sense, the calligraphic idea of the correspondence between *xin* and *shou* has its source in the doctrine of syncretism of body and mind in traditional Chinese philosophy. Mind and body, the psychical and the somatic, as Ames observed, are not dualistic concepts in Chinese philosophy; they are in a state of symbiosis: "the unity of two organismic processes which requires each other as a necessary condition for being what they are."<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ames, Roger T. "The Meaning of Body in Classical Chinese Philosophy." In Kasulis, Thomas P., Roger T. Ames, and Wimal Dissanayake, eds. *Self as Body in Asian Theory and Practice*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993. 173.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 158-159.



## Chapter 5

### Calligraphy Mirrors the Calligrapher

(*shu ru qiren* 書如其人)

Traditional Chinese calligraphic criticism has developed two approaches or attitudes to the appreciation and evaluation of calligraphic works. These two approaches, as the contemporary scholar Hsiung Ping-Ming summarised, are: one, to appreciate the beauty of the calligraphic work; two, to go beyond the artwork, and appraise the calligrapher.<sup>1</sup> This chapter deals with the latter approach, understanding it to be what Stephen Goldberg called “a Chinese ethico-aesthetics”,<sup>2</sup> while the next chapter concerns the former, focusing on the aesthetic object and the process of calligraphic appreciation.

That the value of artwork is influenced, even determined, by the person who creates it is a distinctive feature in Chinese art theory. Around this feature, this chapter is concerned with two important issues in calligraphic criticism – *ren shu guanxi* 人書關係 (relation between an artist and his/her calligraphy), and *shu pin* 書品 (grading or classification of calligraphy/calligrapher).

#### 5.1 *Ren shu guanxi* (Relation between an artist and his/her calligraphy)

Two ideas – *shu ru qiren* 書如其人 (calligraphy is like the person), and *shu pin ji renpin* 書品即人品 (the judgement of calligraphy echoes the moral judgement of the person) – encapsulate the relationship between the evaluation of calligraphy and that of the creative subject. Implied in these two terms is a pattern of the transferring of human values to the value of calligraphy. As the contemporary philosopher Tu Weiming

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<sup>1</sup> Hsiung, Ping-Ming. “Shu yu ren” 書與人 (Calligraphy and Calligrapher). In *Guoji shuxue yantao hui lunwen ji* 國際書學研討會論文集 (Proceedings of the International Symposium on Chinese Calligraphy). Taipei: National Taiwan Arts Education Centre, 1997. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Goldberg, Stephen. “Chinese Aesthetics.” In Deutsch, Eliot, and Ron Bontekoe, eds. *A Companion to World Philosophies*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997. 225-226.

observed, “in China philosophical anthropology has provided much of the symbolic resources for the development of theories of art.”<sup>3</sup> To illustrate the humanist root in the discussion and evaluation of Chinese calligraphy, we need to analyse what kinds of symbolic resources Chinese philosophical anthropology has provided to the discourse on the art of calligraphy. And to this end, this section differentiates two facets of the concept “human” as it has been used in classical calligraphy criticism.

### 5.1.1 The human body

Just as somatic terms play a large part in discourses on calligraphic creation, bodily imageries also abound in texts on Chinese calligraphy appreciation. Scholars and art critics of various dynasties, such as Xu Hao 徐浩 (703-782) of the Tang dynasty, Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) of the Song, and Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775-1855) of the Qing, all mentioned that good calligraphic works should be possessed of sinew and bone, blood and flesh. In *Bi zhen tu* 筆陣圖 (Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush), an early well-known work on calligraphy, one can read that:

善筆力者多骨，不善筆力者多肉；多骨微肉者謂之筋書，多肉微骨者謂之墨豬。多力豐筋者聖，無力無筋肉者病。<sup>4</sup>

Those skilled at imparting strength to their brush have much bone (*i.e.*, a strong structure), while those not so skilled have much flesh. Calligraphy with much bone and little flesh is called sinewy; that which has much flesh and little bone is called “ink pig.” Writing that displays great strength and a richness of sinew is sage-like; that which has neither strength nor sinew is defective.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tu, Weiming. “The Idea of the Human in Mencian Thought: An Approach to Chinese Aesthetics.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Hanwei liuchao shuhua lun* 漢魏六朝書畫論 (Texts on Calligraphy and Painting from the Han, Wei, and Six Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Translation cited from Barnhart, Richard M. “Wei Fu-Jen’s Pi Chen T’u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy.” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

Physiological metaphors like these are efficacious in the viewers' encountering with, and understanding of, Chinese calligraphy. As the contemporary art historian John Hay put it:

It is immediately effective to ask someone, in their first meeting with calligraphy, to look at the characters as though they were a body structure – as supporting skeletal structures made beautiful with flesh, and strong with muscle and sinew – to suggest they grasp kinesthetically the implications of movement, so that they can perceive the tensions and balance within the writing through these same functions within their body.<sup>6</sup>

Here Chinese calligraphy is personified, and the conceptual metaphor latent in this personification can be simplified as “Calligraphy is a person”. The term “conceptual metaphor”, borrowed from cognitive linguists George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, could be of help for us to understand how and why calligraphy in China is metaphorically structured as the human body.<sup>7</sup>

According to Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphors equate two concept areas – the source domain and the target domain, and in our case the former refers to “the human body”, and the latter “calligraphy”. Thus, the first point of our concern is the connections or correspondences between these two domains. Many Chinese physiological terms are used in the description of calligraphy, and here I choose one of the most important – *gu* 骨. The English equivalents of *gu* are “bone” and “skeleton”, which means that *gu* in Chinese refers both to the bone and the framework of bones supporting a human body. In Chinese medical theory, *gu* stores energy, and “moves active and structive physiological energies.”<sup>8</sup> The two features of the source domain, i.e., the *gu* of the human body, are thus the embodiment of strength and the basic

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<sup>6</sup> Hay, John. “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 75.

<sup>7</sup> Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Porkert, Manfred. *The Theoretical Basis of Chinese Medicine: Systems of Correspondence*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1974. 165.

physiological structure. In the target domain, i.e., calligraphic works, these two features correspond to the strength within the brushstrokes and the structure of the characters. With this in mind, we can understand why the *Bizhen tu* has it that “Those skilled at imparting strength to their brush have much bone (*i.e.*, a strong structure), while those not so skilled have much flesh.”<sup>9</sup> Flesh or *rou*, as understood in Chinese medicine, does not store energy, and according to the second-century *Shuowen* lexicon, “*gu* (bone) is the nucleus of *rou* (flesh).”<sup>10</sup> The antithesis of *gu* and *rou* in *Bizhen tu* probably has its source in this definition. Several calligraphy theorists of later dynasties go further to explain how the *gu*, *rou*, even *xue* 血 (blood) come into being in calligraphy. As Bao Shichen wrote:

骨者毫之所為，血者水之所為，肉者墨之所為。<sup>11</sup>

Bone [in a piece of calligraphy] is brought about by the brush tip, blood by the water, and flesh by the ink.

Bao’s explanation is rather palpable. All brushstrokes in a calligraphic work are the production of a calligrapher who employs a writing brush, dips it in the ink (as a blend of water and ink), and then writes. When we speak of a specific brushstroke, we’re talking about the whole ink trace, the space being permeated by the water and ink on a piece of paper or silk, which, however, should be distinguished from the bone of that particular stroke. This can be likened to a person’s limb that consists of flesh, blood and bone. Bone is covered by the flesh in the human body, and likewise the bone of a brushstroke is surrounded by the blood/water and the flesh/ink that constitute this stroke. It is thus quite understandable why discerning the bone of calligraphy is rather

<sup>9</sup> Barnhart, Richard M. “Wei Fu-Jen’s Pi Chen T’u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy.” *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

<sup>10</sup> In Chinese: 骨，肉之藏。Xu, Shen. *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (An Explication of Written Characters). Beijing: Jiuzhou chubanshe, 2001. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Nakata, Yujiro, ed. *Chügoku shoron taikē* 中國書論大系 (Study on Chinese Calligraphy). Vol. 15. Tokyo: Nigensha, 1983. 150-151.

difficult, even though great connoisseurs like Bao implied that it is the potent trajectory of the brush tip within the whole ink trace. The bones and the framework of bones support a human body, and likewise the bones within the brushstrokes sustain, and for some calligraphy theorists, legitimate a piece of calligraphy.

In classical Chinese, another meaning of *gu* relates to the personality or temperament of a person, and it is also widely appropriated in the evaluation of Chinese calligraphers and their works. This aspect adds to this term in calligraphy criticism a moral connotation, which I discuss later this chapter.

Conceptual metaphors, in the sense given by Lakoff and Johnson, may be culture-specific. Why is calligraphy, as well as other major arts like painting and poetry in China, compared to the human body? Hay convincingly tackled this issue from the perspective of Chinese medical theory:

The fact that the human body *is* so vividly a source of both perceptions and values, that the Chinese medical theory articulated so precisely the very tangible energetics of the body, and that it seems this articulation and its sophisticated terminology were roughly contemporary with but probably slightly earlier than corresponding developments in art theory, make it likely that the former is a major source for the latter. A principle theme in the evolution of first the medical and then the art theory is the increasing differentiation and integration of energy flow into energy pattern.<sup>12</sup>

The extension of a Chinese medical theory into Chinese calligraphy criticism is legitimated, as Hay notes, by the fact that both the human body and Chinese calligraphic works were regarded as a network of energy, hence the analogy. For other scholars like Qian Zhongshu, however, some pre-Qin classical texts – centuries earlier than the maturation of medical theory – already anticipated this feature of Chinese art theory.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hay, John. “The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 89.

<sup>13</sup> Qian, Zhongshu. *Qian Zhongshu sanwen* 錢鍾書散文 (Selected Essays of Qian Zhongshu). Hangzhou:

In *Book of Changes*, one can read:

古者包犧氏之王天下也……近取諸身，遠取諸物，於是始作八卦，以通神明之德，以類萬物之情。<sup>14</sup>

Anciently, when the rule of all under heaven was in the hands of Pao-hsi...Near at hand, in his own person, he found things for consideration, and the same at a distance, in things in general. On this he devised eight lineal figures of three lines each, to show fully the attributes of the spirit-like and intelligent (in nature), and to classify the qualities of the myriads of things.<sup>15</sup>

As the famous Confucian scholar Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574-648) understood it, “his own person” in the above passage refers to nothing but “the ear, eye, nose, mouth and the like” of the person, or in short, to the human body.<sup>16</sup> That is to say, ancient Chinese took the human body as a reference system in order to understand the myriads of things. When later Chinese art theorists compared a piece of writing or calligraphy to the human body, it thus makes sense to say that such an anthropomorphic tendency has roots in early Chinese epistemology.

#### 5.1.2 Moral character

The second aspect of the concept “human” in Chinese calligraphy criticism is the spiritual dimensions of the calligrapher. My fourth chapter analysed how the mental or spiritual aspects, such as *xing* (nature), *qing* (emotion), and *yi* (intention or idea), participate in the calligraphic creation, manifesting in calligraphic lines that are the

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Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1997. 391.

<sup>14</sup> Li, Xueqin, ed. *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (Rectified Interpretations of the Book of Changes). Taipei: Wu-Nan Book Inc., 2001. 380.

<sup>15</sup> Legge, James, trans. *The I Ching*. New York: Dover Publications, 1963. 382-383.

<sup>16</sup> In Chinese: 近取諸身者，若耳目鼻口之屬是也。Kong, Yingda. *Zhouyi zhengyi* 周易正義 (Rectified Interpretations of the Book of Changes). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980. 413.

embodiment of the creative artist's mind. That a calligrapher's mind is reflected in his or her calligraphy is particularly pertinent to the understanding of transferring of human values to the value of calligraphy. This section adopts a historical perspective on this issue, and focuses on the calligrapher's moral self or moral virtue, an essential aspect for us to understand the peculiarity of calligraphic evaluation.

As early as the Six Dynasties (222-589), it is a commonplace in calligraphy criticism that terms used to describe human character were extended to the discussion of calligraphy. In *Gujin shuping* 古今書評 (Remarks on Calligraphy: Past and Present), Yuan Ang 袁昂 (461-540) commented that Wang Xizhi's calligraphy has an elegant demeanor (*fengqi* 風氣), Yang Xin's calligraphy is bashful (*xiuse* 羞澀), and Cai Yong's calligraphy brimming with radiating vigour (*youshen* 有神). Such a tendency was also prevalent among literary criticism of the same period: in Zhong Rong's 鍾嶸 (469-518) *Shi pin* 詩品 (Gradings of Poets), one can read that Ren Fang's poetry "succeeds in having the air of a man of affairs", and Liu Kun and Lu Chen's poems "excelled at fashioning heart-rending language and had a pure and outstanding spirit."<sup>17</sup> Some of the key terms that are descriptive of human nature, such as *qi* 氣 (spirit; life-breath), *yun* 韻 (manner; attitude; resonance), and *feng* 風 (temper, animating force directed outward), have their roots in the practice of characterology that began in the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220). According to contemporary art historian Amy McNair, characterology, or the study of man, is

the ancient pseudoscience of assessing a man's character and fitness for government office from examination of his aesthetic effect, both in his physical appearance and comportment and in his practice of the polite arts...[It] is based on the belief that because the style of the inner being and the outer person is unitary, moral character can be deduced from an examination of a person's

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<sup>17</sup> Translation cited from Wixted, John T. "The Nature of Evaluation in the *Shih-p'in* (Gradings of Poets) by Chung Hung". In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 233.

external manifestations, such as appearance, behavior, or aesthetic endeavor.<sup>18</sup>

Within this characterological tradition, a scholar-artist's inner being – personality and moral integrity, and his or her outer being – appearance, behaviour and aesthetic self-discourse, are inseparable. When art theorists of the Six Dynasties, such as Zhong Rong in the area of literary criticism, Yuan Ang of calligraphy and Xie He of painting, applied terms descriptive of human character in aesthetic judgement, as Stephen Goldberg points out, they did an affective reading of the qualities of the brushwork and the literary forms as “visual indices of the character of the author.”<sup>19</sup>

Reading texts on calligraphy and painting from the Six Dynasties to the early Tang, one can find that there is no lack of evidence of the transferring of the terms from denoting human value to conveying artistic value. But no calligraphy or painting theorist before the Tang dynasty explicitly expressed the view that a virtuous character produces good art.<sup>20</sup> Such a view manifests itself in a few frequently cited Tang-dynasty passages, such as Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Records of Famous Painters through the Ages):

自古善畫者，莫匪衣冠貴胄，逸士高人……<sup>21</sup>

From ancient times, those who have excelled in painting have all been men robed and capped and of noble descent, retired scholars and lofty-minded men.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> McNair, Amy. *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Goldberg, Stephen. “Chinese Aesthetics.” In Deutsch, Eliot, and Ron Bontekoe, eds. *A Companion to World Philosophies*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997. 225.

<sup>20</sup> It should be pointed out that in the area of literary criticism, this view is present as early as the Han Dynasty. In *Lun heng*, one can read that “The greater a man's virtue, the more refined is his literary work.” For further discussion of this issue, see Cahill, James. “Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting.” In Wright, Arthur F., ed. *The Confucian Persuasion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960. 123-126; McNair, Amy. *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Zhang, Yanyuan; Yu Jianhua, comm. *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Record of Famous Painters through the Ages). Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1964. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Translation cited from Cahill, James. “Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting.” In Wright, Arthur F., ed. *The Confucian Persuasion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960. 121-122.



For James Cahill, Zhang Yanyuan's assertion reflects a transition in the Confucian view of Chinese painting, from an older view which "attached moral value to paintings by virtue of the subjects they portrayed" to a "new concept by which a Confucian humanist approach could be applied to his judgments of artistic quality."<sup>23</sup> Such a renewed Confucian humanist attitude to painting, Cahill held, lays the foundation for the literati painting (*wenren hua* 文人畫) theory. And in light of the literati theory, "nobility in a painting...can only be a reflection of nobility in the man."<sup>24</sup>

It is generally believed that an early statement that implies the tendency to evaluate the aesthetic qualities of calligraphy in direct reference to the artist's moral rectitude is made by the late Tang calligrapher Liu Gongquan 柳公權 (778-865). In response to Emperor Muzong's (r. 821-824) question of how one can be perfectly skilled at brushwork, Liu replied: "The use of the brush lies in the heart. If your heart is upright, then your brush will be upright."<sup>25</sup> For Ronald Egan, such a way of evaluation can be classified as a moralistic approach. Since the Song dynasty, critical texts that adopt a moralistic stance are prevalent in calligraphy criticism. Selected below are a few frequently cited passages:

非自古賢者必能書也，惟賢者能存爾。（北宋・歐陽修）<sup>26</sup>

Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072): It is not that the worthy men in ancient times were all skilled at calligraphy, but that only the calligraphy of those who had admirable moral character was worth handing down.

古之論書者，兼論其生平，苟非其人，雖工不貴。（北宋・蘇軾）<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>25</sup> Translation cited from McNair, Amy. *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. 2. For further discussion of Liu's reply, see Egan, Ronald. "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 388-389.

<sup>26</sup> Ouyang, Xiu; Li Zhiliang, ed. *Ouyang Xiu ji biannian jianzhu* 歐陽修集編年箋注 (Annotations of Ouyang Xiu's Works in Chronological Order). Vol. 7. Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2007. 159.

<sup>27</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 32.

Su Shi (1037-1101): Those who evaluated calligraphy in ancient times also evaluated the life of the calligrapher. If the man was not praiseworthy, then even if his calligraphy was skillful, it was not valued.<sup>28</sup>

風神者，一須人品高。（南宋・姜夔）<sup>29</sup>

Jiang Kui (1155-1221): The first requirement for the animating force [of the characters] is a noble character [on the part of the calligrapher].<sup>30</sup>

苟其人品凡下，頗僻側媚，縱其書工，其中心蘊蓄者亦不能揜，有諸內者必形諸外也。若二王、顏、坡之忠正高古，縱其書不工，亦無凡下之筆矣，況於工乎。（元・郝經）<sup>31</sup>

Hao Jing (1223-1275): If a person's character is mean, [such as] being perverse, one-sided or a flatterer, even if his or her calligraphy is skillful, what is embodied [in the calligraphy] cannot be covered up; that which is innermost [to the calligrapher] will manifest itself outside. The two Wangs, Yan Zhenqing and Su Dongpo were all men of upright and lofty character; even if their calligraphy is not skillful, their calligraphy won't have any mediocre or banal brushstrokes, though in fact they were all skilled.

The above texts, as indicators of moralism in Chinese calligraphy criticism, raise an important issue. The words of Ouyang Xiu touch the issue of the transmission and the canonization of calligraphic works throughout Chinese history. A calligrapher's

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<sup>28</sup> Translation cited from Egan, Ronald. "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 398.

<sup>29</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 257.

<sup>30</sup> Translation based on Chang, Ch'ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 27.

<sup>31</sup> Mao, Wanbao, and Huang Jun, eds. *Zhongguo gudai shulun leibian* 中國古代書論類編 (Classified Collection of Classical Chinese Texts on Calligraphy). Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009. 714.

works can only be handed down when he has been remembered as a worthy man, especially in character, virtue, or action. Conversely, if a skilled calligrapher has no great deeds to his or her credit or no praiseworthy character, it's unlikely that his or her calligraphy will be valued.

For scholars like Wang Shizhen 王士禛 (1634-1711), this is a widespread idea in Chinese art criticism. Poems, essays, works of calligraphy and painting, as he said, are considered valuable because later critics esteem the person who created the works (*yi ren zhong* 以人重).<sup>32</sup> Wang Shizhen would agree with Ouyang Xiu's implying that it is the value of the artist that is conducive to the transmission of his or her works (*yi ren chuan* 以人傳). It is generally believed that this moralistic approach in the evaluation of Chinese art serves a social purpose in the Confucian system. As James Cahill said: "If the manifold facets of the mind, the character, the exemplary qualities, of the superior man can be communicated in a work of art, then those qualities may be perceived by others and implanted in them."<sup>33</sup> Treasuring the calligraphic works of those morally worthy, such as Yan Zhenqin, Chinese connoisseurs are appreciating the ink traces as "outward manifestations of inner character."<sup>34</sup>

Why did China develop an art theory that emphasises the value of the creative subject? The root of such a "non-autonomous" art theory lies in the practice of art in a Confucian tradition being regarded as an important means of self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身). In the *Boof of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), one can read that "the perfection of virtue is primary, and the perfection of art follows afterward."<sup>35</sup> Here, a Confucian classic makes a distinction between virtue (*de* 德) and art (*yi* 藝), which, as Cahill put it, "takes up the fundamental Confucian problem of aesthetic quality vs. moral significance."<sup>36</sup> Such a distinction is also implied in the above cited passages by Su

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<sup>32</sup> Wang, Shizhen. *Xiangzu biji* 香祖筆記 (Miscellaneous Notes Compiled for the "Fragrant Ancestor"). Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1982. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Cahill, James. "Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting." In Wright, Arthur F., ed. *The Confucian Persuasion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960. 124.

<sup>34</sup> McNair, Amy. *The Upright Brush: Yan Zhenqing's Calligraphy and Song Literati Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998. xiv.

<sup>35</sup> In Chinese: 德成而上，藝成而下。 Translation cited from Cahill, James. "Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting." In Wright, Arthur F., ed. *The Confucian Persuasion*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960. 122.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

Shi and Hao Jing, where both of the two scholar-artists consider *gong* 工 (skill, artistry) and *pin* 品 (moral quality) as two factors in calligraphic evaluation. Within this specific context, *gong* refers to the formal properties of one's calligraphy, and *pin*, to the moral aspect of the calligrapher. That is, to say one's calligraphy is *gong* (skillful) or *bugong* 不工 (not skillful) is an aesthetic judgement, while to say one has a mean character (*pin xia* 品下) or noble character (*pin gao* 品高) is a moral judgement. And apparently, for these two critics and others who follow a moralistic approach, the moral aspect prevails in the evaluation of Chinese calligraphy. This is not hard to explain. In classical Confucian thought, the moral value, the moral perfection on the part of the cultured elite artist is an end, while the practice of art, as “disciplines of the body (*ti* 體) and mind/heart (*xin* 心), which engages the gentleman-scholar in the cultivation of the self (*xiushen*)”<sup>37</sup>, provides a Confucian artist a means to that end. Within a cohesive continuous Confucian society, the aesthetic expression of an artist – a significant part of them being Confucianist, according to Stephen Goldberg, has an “ethically normative force”, which outweighs the substantive aesthetic force of a work of Chinese art.<sup>38</sup>

The defect of a moralistic appreciation is obvious. With this approach, a calligraphy critic would find it hard not to use the personality of the artist to explain the brushwork, even when certain formal qualities of the work being presented are not really there. Within the Chinese literati art world, such moralism is an influential attitude, but such an attitude, if adopted by an objective art critic, is neither fair nor helpful. A Western art theorist might say this is simply not an aesthetic or disinterested judgement. That being said, there are a few Chinese calligraphy critics who are fully aware of the problems with this approach. Su Shi, for example, though he himself demonstrated a tendency to evaluate a person's calligraphy based on the judgement of the calligrapher's conducts and moral worth, wrote in contradiction to what he said elsewhere:

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<sup>37</sup> Goldberg, Stephen. “Chinese Aesthetics.” In Deutsch, Eliot, and Ron Bontekoe, eds. *A Companion to World Philosophies*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997. 226.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

觀其書，有以得其為人，則君子小人必見於書，是殆不然。以貌取人且猶不可，而況書乎？<sup>39</sup>

If from examining a person's calligraphy one can tell what kind of man he is, then the character of superior men and mean-minded men must both be reflected in their calligraphy. This would appear to be incorrect. To select people on the basis of their face is considered improper – how much worse, then, to do so on the basis of their calligraphy!<sup>40</sup>

The Qing-dynasty scholar and calligrapher Wu Dexuan 吳德旋 (1767-1840) also wrote that:

張果亭、王覺斯人品頹喪，而作字居然有北宋大家之風，豈得以其人而廢之。<sup>41</sup>

Zhang Ruitu and Wang Duo's moral character was weak and substandard, but unexpectedly their calligraphy has a manner and bearing resembling those of the Northern Song masters. How could one dismiss their calligraphy based on their personality?

Both Su Shi and Wu Dexuan raised doubts over the moralistic appreciation of calligraphy. On Su Shi's part, he called into question the proposition that a person's character can be revealed in his or her calligraphy by analogy to the partiality of judging people by their appearance. From another perspective, Wu Dexuan challenged the

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<sup>39</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 17.

<sup>40</sup> Translation cited from Egan, Ronald. "Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 400.

<sup>41</sup> Mao, Wanbao, and Huang Jun. *Zhongguo gudai shulun leibian* 中國古代書論類編 (Classified Collection of Classical Chinese Texts on Calligraphy). Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009. 716.

moralist view that good calligraphy is produced by morally worthy calligraphers, drawing the examples of Zhang Ruitu and Wang Duo – two famous Ming calligraphers who have often been denounced by later art critics for their lack of moral integrity. For Wu Dexuan, Zhang Ruitu and Wang Duo’s moral stigma does not impair the aesthetic value of their brushwork, a view that is directly opposed to that of the moralistic critic Jiang Kui cited above. For Jiang, calligraphy that has a manner or aesthetic force can only be created by a person of noble character.

With all the misgivings about moralism, it is still a potent approach or tendency in Chinese art criticism, one which has profoundly influenced Chinese literati critics’ evaluation of the major arts like calligraphy, painting, and poetry. Contemporary art historian James Cahill added a few qualifications to the moralistic stance in the evaluation of Chinese painting, which, I believe, are also applicable to moralistic calligraphic appreciation:

Obviously, not all good painters were sages or paragons of virtue; nor were all men of noble character good painters. No critic of any consequence ever judged a picture according to what he knew about the moral worth of the artist. A literati critic was likely, on the one hand, to consider the admirable qualities which he perceived in the picture to be reflections of admirable qualities in the man who produced it. The notion of “the man revealed in the painting” was used, that is, to account for excellence in art, not to determine it.<sup>42</sup>

In this section, I have discussed two kinds of symbolic resources Chinese philosophical anthropology has provided to the discourses on calligraphic evaluation: one deploys physiological metaphors or body imagery to understand a piece of calligraphy, and the other employs moral judgement of the artist to explain the excellence in his or her calligraphy. In Chinese academia, discussions of *ren shu guanxi*

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<sup>42</sup> Cahill, James. “Confucian Elements in the Theory of Painting.” In Wright, Arthur F., ed. *The Confucian Persuasion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960. 130.

(relation between a person and his/her calligraphy) tend to focus on the moralistic approach.<sup>43</sup> However, I argue that the physiological aspect and the moralistic aspect of *ren shu guanxi* are not entirely separated. The above-mentioned term *gu* (bone), for example, as a physiological concept used in calligraphy criticism that denotes the calligraphic structure, can also describe the basic character of a person. And accordingly, this latter sense of *gu* has been widely employed in the evaluation of Chinese poetry, painting and calligraphy, connoting a forceful style that is transmitted from the artist to his or her artwork. That is to say that *gu* has both aesthetic and ethical implications in Chinese art criticism. The relationship between a calligrapher and his/her calligraphy is a live issue in contemporary theoretical discussion on calligraphy.<sup>44</sup> A further discussion of this issue, I believe, should focus on specific calligraphic terms, examining the changing meanings of the terms and their possible connotations in texts on calligraphy.

## 5.2 *Shu pin* 書品: gradings of calligrapher/calligraphy

In this section I discuss an important paradigm in Chinese calligraphic evaluation, one which can be identified as an efficacious framework, the gradation (*pin* 品) of both Chinese calligraphers and their calligraphy. From the outset, one needs to be aware that this evaluative paradigm in calligraphy criticism is closely related to the issue of *ren shu guanxi*; some might even say that the former is intrinsically affiliated to the latter.

As the core term that holds up this evaluative framework, *pin* has two basic meanings. In the first place, it is widely employed in Chinese people's classification of things. The Southern Song scholar Hong Zun 洪遵 (1120-1174), for example, classified coins into nine types (*pin*); the Qing Dynasty ink maker Cao Sugong 曹素功 (1615-1689) categorised the ink sticks he made into eighteen groups. In pre-modern

<sup>43</sup> Hsiung, Ping-Ming. "Shu yu ren" 書與人 (Calligraphy and Calligrapher). In *Guoji shuxue yantao hui lunwen ji* 國際書學研討會論文集 (Proceedings of the International Symposium on Chinese Calligraphy). Taipei: National Taiwan Arts Education Centre, 1997. 9-27.

<sup>44</sup> For example, see Lin, Chun-Chen. "Zhongguo shufa ren shu wenti xilun 中國書法人書問題析論 (Analysis of Chinese Calligraphy: People and Calligraphy)." Ph.D. diss., National Chung Hsing University, 2015.

Chinese texts, classifications like this are ubiquitous – one can find the classifications (*pin*) of flowers, teas, wines, incense materials, etc. Implied in every classification is an understanding of that specific area. Quoting a Chinese passage that divides animals into fourteen groups, Michel Foucault said in the preface to *The Order of Things* that it demonstrates the “exotic charm of another system of thought.”<sup>45</sup> *Pin* also refers to the rank of things, indicating a degree or grade of excellence. This aspect of *pin* is closely related to the first aspect of classification; the difference lies in that *pin* as classification does not designate a hierarchy.

When the Southern dynasty Yu Jianwu 庾肩吾 (487-551), in his *Shu pin* 書品 (Gradings of Calligraphers), classified 123 calligraphers from Han to Liang dynasties into nine degrees, including in order upper-upper, upper-middle, upper-lower, middle-upper, etc., it is apparent that Yu made a value judgement of the calligraphers. Before discussing the characteristics of Yu’s evaluation, I would like to start with the background to this first work applying *pin* theory in calligraphy criticism.

Calligraphy criticism is not the only art that developed a system of grading. In Yu’s time, as John Timothy Wixted observed, “classification in the arts became the vogue.”<sup>46</sup> Other well-known examples are Zhong Rong’s 钟嵘 (469-518) *Shi pin* 詩品 (Gradings of Poets) and Xie He’s 謝赫 (act. 500-535) *Gu hua pin lu* 古畫品錄 (Old Records of Gradings of Painters). It is generally believed that the Chinese tradition of grading artists into different ranks owes much to the earlier nine-rank system, a civil service nomination system that rates officials to nine ranks based on their talents, achievements, and abilities. The nine-rank system occurred in the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), and was replaced by the imperial examination system in the Sui Dynasty (581-618);<sup>47</sup> the period between witnessed the first phase of evolution of Chinese art theory. Most of these early art theorists are scholars in the officialdom, thus it is easily understandable that they would tend to employ the classification schemes in

<sup>45</sup> Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. Psychology Press, 2002. xvi.

<sup>46</sup> Wixted, John T. “The Nature of Evaluation in the *Shih-p’in* (Gradings of Poets) by Chung Hung.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 228.

<sup>47</sup> For a brief discussion of the development of the rank system between the Han and the Tang, see Elman, Benjamin A. *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000. 5-7.



the language of the arts as well as in the political administration.<sup>48</sup>

At first glance, the early Chinese texts on the classification of arts are not much different to earlier characterological texts: they all present short evaluative passages of individual artists. In Yu's *Shu pin*, for example, he started with directly putting down the names of three calligraphers that are ranked in the highest *pin* (degree, class) of upper-upper (*shang zhi shang* 上之上) – Zhang Zhi 張芝, Zhong You 鍾繇, and Wang Xizhi, which is followed by an evaluative description of them. And then he went on to five other calligraphers who fell under the second highest degree of upper-middle (*Shang zhi zhong* 上之中), and so on. Other such works, Xie He's *Gu hua pin lu* for instance, also conformed to the same layout. But, by closely reading the descriptions of individual calligraphers in *Shu pin*, one will find that the traits Yu Jianwu focused on are different from earlier characterological texts such as Liu Yiqing's 劉義慶 (403-444) *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 (A New Account of the Tales of the World). Critics in the characterological tradition, as Wixted noticed, tended to characterise people “in a few well-chosen, preferably abstruse and poetic words” such as *qi* 氣 (spirit), *feng* 風 (air; temper), *qing* 清 (pure; spotless in conduct).<sup>49</sup> In *Shu pin*, however, Yu was primarily concerned with the calligraphic practice of the calligraphers he chose. Comparing the three calligraphers from the upper-upper class, he wrote that:

張工夫第一，天然次之……鍾天然第一，工夫次之……王工夫不及張，天然過之；天然不及鍾，工夫過之。<sup>50</sup>

Zhang Zhi stands first in *gongfu* (technical skill), and in *tianran* (heavenly spontaneity) he comes second; Zhong You stands first in *tianran*, and in *gongfu* he comes second. In *gongfu*, Wang Xizhi does not reach Zhang, but in *tianran* he surpassed him; In *tianran*, Wang does not reach Zhong, but in *gongfu* he

<sup>48</sup> Escande, Yolaine. “Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan's *Shuduan*.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 150.

<sup>49</sup> Wixted, John T. “The Nature of Evaluation in the *Shih-p'in* (Gradings of Poets) by Chung Hung.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 232.

<sup>50</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979.

surpassed him.

The antithesis of *tianran* and *gongfu*, first being used by Wang Sengqian 王僧虔 (426-485) in *Lunshu* 論書 (On Calligraphy), is employed here as Yu's evaluative criteria.<sup>51</sup> Citing this passage, I want to demonstrate that, though Yu's *Shu pin* seems to follow the format of the texts in the characterological tradition, his discussion of the calligraphers tends to focus on their calligraphic practice and achievements rather than "characterisations." On the surface, *Shu pin* seems just another work on personality appraisal (*renwu pinzao* 人物品藻), but Yu's classification does in fact imply a certain artistic ground. In addition to that, it needs to be pointed out that the whole *Shu pin* does not mention any actual calligraphic work. That is, when Yu ranked Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344-386) in the upper-middle class, he did a holistic evaluation of Wang Xianzhi's calligraphic practice and his overall style. As we will see, these two points are of importance for us to understand later evaluative classifications of calligraphy.

### 5.2.1 Basic categories in the calligraphic ranking system

Yu Jianwu's three-degree classification – *shang* (upper), *zhong* (middle), *xia* (lower) – developed in the Tang Dynasty into a four-degree ranking system that employed specific names, i.e., *shen* 神 (divine or inspired), *miao* 妙 (marvellous), *neng* 能 (competent), and *yi* 逸 (unconstrained). In *Shupin hou* 書品後 (Gradings of Calligraphers Continuation), the early Tang artist-official Li Sizhen 李嗣真 (?-696) followed Yu's model, but he added a new "unconstrained" or *yi* class of calligraphers who belonged to "a group beyond classification."<sup>52</sup> In the history of Chinese art criticism, this was the first time for a critic to use a specific category to identify a group of artists, and it clearly influenced succeeding critics. A few decades after Li's *Shupin*

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of *tianran* and *gongfu* in Six Dynasties' calligraphy criticism, see Ledderose, Lothar. "Some Taoist Elements in the Calligraphy of the Six Dynasties." *T'oung Pao* 70 (1984): 267.

<sup>52</sup> Vinograd, Richard. "Classification, Canon, and Genre." In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 256.

hou, Zhang Huaiguan's 張懷瓘 (act. 713-741) *Shuduan* 書斷 (Judgements on Calligraphers) pioneered the use of the tripartite scheme – *shen*, *miao*, and *neng* – to rank calligraphers. A unique feature of *Shuduan* is that Zhang started to distinguish various calligraphic scripts (regular, seal, cursive, etc) in the evaluative classification of a calligrapher. That is to say, the various scripts of the same calligrapher, based on their respective degrees of excellence, might be allocated to different classes.

It is generally believed that Zhang's tripartite scheme matches Yu's three-degree classification system. As Yolaine Escande explained in a recent article:

there is a correspondence between the higher degree, *shang*, and the class called *shen* 神 (divine, inspired), between the average degree, *zhong*, and the *miao* 妙 (marvelous) class, and last between the lowest degree, *xia*, and the *neng* 能 (competent, talented) class...[Zhang's] gradings...are implicitly linked to traditional degree rankings (*shang*, *zhong*, *xia*).<sup>53</sup>

In fact, Zhang's three evaluative categories were nothing new in Tang art discourse. During the Six Dynasties, the aesthetic category of *shen*, for example, had already been extensively used in "discussions on authorial qualities, the creative process, and the principles of aesthetic judgment."<sup>54</sup> Besides, as all of the three terms are mentioned in Yu Jianwu's *Shu pin*, it can be assumed that Zhang Huaiguan was inspired by Yu's work to introduce the new evaluative tripartite system.

Shortly afterward, Zhang's tripartite scheme of *shen*, *miao*, *neng*, along with Li Sizhen's *yi*, was adopted and integrated by other art critics. In the Preface to *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄 (Record of Famous Painters of the Tang Dynasty), a text that ranks leading Tang painters and records their biographies, Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 (act. 840-846) wrote that:

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<sup>53</sup> Escande, Yolaine. "Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan's *Shuduan*." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 150.

<sup>54</sup> Cai, Zong-qi. "The Conceptual Origins and Aesthetic Significance of 'Shen' in Six Dynasties Texts on Literature and Painting." In Cai, Zong-qi, ed. *Chinese Aesthetics: The Ordering of Literature, the Arts, and the Universe in the Six Dynasties*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004. 310-311.

以張懷瓘《畫品》斷，神、妙、能三品，定其等格，上中下又分為三；其格外有不拘常法，又有逸品，以表其優劣也。<sup>55</sup>

According to Zhang Huaiguan, calligraphy should be classified in three categories, i.e. *shen*, *miao*, and *neng*, and in each of these he distinguishes a superior, a middle and an inferior degree. Those outside the three categories have no method at all. But there is also the *yi* class (or category) which may be characterized either as excellent or as vile (high or low).<sup>56</sup>

In Zhu Jingxuan's classification, the *yi* class of painters is added at the very end to the other three classes. In the early eleventh-century text *yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 (Records of Famous Painters in Yizhou), however, Huang Xiufu 黃休復 (fl. 1006) ranked the *yi* class above the other three. This change in the status of *yi* or unconstrained category, according to Vinograd, "may have been influenced by regional tastes, by personal preference for unconventional qualities, or by changes in the social status of painters."<sup>57</sup> Regardless of the ranking of *yi*, the tripartite ranking scheme of *shen*, *miao*, *neng*, or the four-category scheme that includes *yi* has, at all events, become an important paradigm in Chinese art discourse since the Northern Song dynasty. Accordingly, critical texts that employ such evaluative categories and rankings form a unique genre in Chinese art criticism. To give a few more examples, the Northern Song treatise *Xu Shuduan* 續書斷 (Judgements on Calligraphers Continuation), composed by Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1039-1098) followed Zhang Huaiguan's tripartite evaluative model. The Ming dynasty artist Wang Zhideng's 王穉登 (1535-1612) *Wujun danqing zhi* 吳郡丹青志 (Record of the Painters of Suzhou) employed the four-degree classification of *shen*, *miao*, *neng*, and *yi*. Up to the Qing dynasty, when

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<sup>55</sup> Yu, Jianhua, ed. *Zhongguo gudai hualun leibian* 中國古代畫論類編 (Classified Collection of Historical Texts on Chinese Painting). Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1998. 22.

<sup>56</sup> Sirén, Osvald. *The Chinese on the Art of Painting: Translations and Comments*. New York: Schocken Books, 1963. 34.

<sup>57</sup> Vinograd, Richard. "Classification, Canon, and Genre." In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 256.

Bao Shichen 包世臣 (1775-1855) classified Qing dynasty calligraphers, his practice still applied such a traditional ranking system.<sup>58</sup>

One might ask, why did this system develop and last for such a long time? I think this question can be examined from two perspectives. On one hand, the above-mentioned classifying schemes do play an active role in the pre-modern Chinese art world. As Vinograd well summarised, “such systems fulfill two major functions: *organizing* the diversity of information about artistic production, and guiding *assessment* of cultural, critical, and economic value.”<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, I contend that the stability within the evaluative classes or categories per se (*shen*, *miao*, *neng*, and *yi*) contributes to its long-lasting efficacy. When the four-category classification first took shape during the end of Tang and the beginning of Northern Song, each of the four classes had been designated, implicitly or explicitly, its own stipulation. The distinction between the ranks is clearly drawn, and it is the tension created by the differences in degrees of excellence that maintains the operation of such a system.

It is thus necessary to further discuss the meanings of the four classes and their distinctions as understood by Chinese art critics. Zhang Huaiguan, the initiator of the three-class system of the Divine, Excellent, and Competent, wrote of the divergence between them in *Shudian*:

且妙之企神，非徒步驟，能之仰妙，又甚規隨。<sup>60</sup>

*Miao* aspires to *shen*; but one who walks cannot gallop. *Neng* hopes to become *miao*, but follows the rules excessively.<sup>61</sup>

Zhang’s brief remarks make it evident that the three categories indicate “different

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<sup>58</sup> In *Guochao shupin* 國朝書品 (Gradings of Calligraphers in the Qing Dynasty), Bao Shichen added a fifth category of *jia* 佳 (fair) after the “Inspired”, “Excellent”, “Competent”, and “Unconstrained” classes.

<sup>59</sup> Vinograd, Richard. “Classification, Canon, and Genre.” In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 254.

<sup>60</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhang Huaiguan Shulun* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan’s Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 129.

<sup>61</sup> Translation cited from Escande, Yolaine. “Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan’s *Shudian*.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 163.

degrees of value or quality.”<sup>62</sup> In addition, readers get a vague idea that the calligraphers he ranked in the *neng* class stick slavishly to the calligraphic techniques, which may impede their upgrading to the higher class of *miao*. But beside that, one can hardly grasp the connotations of the other two categories. Dou Meng 竇蒙 (act. 742-755), a Tang scholar-official and a contemporary of Zhang Huaiguan, realising that the ambiguities in key artistic terms caused difficulties in understanding texts on calligraphy, endeavoured to define the commonly used aesthetic terms in his *Shu shu fu* 述書賦 (Rhapsody to Chinese Calligraphy). In this book, we can read that:

神：非意所到可以識知；

妙：百般滋味曰妙；

能：千種風流曰能；

逸：縱任無方曰逸。<sup>63</sup>

*Shen*: it can not be reached intentionally, but can be conceived.

*Miao*: having a multitude of shades and savors.

*Neng*: able to master all scripts.

*Yi*: being carefree and having no fixed direction.<sup>64</sup>

Somewhat obscure, Dou Meng’s definitions are of help for us to understand the meanings of the categories as they were used in Tang art discourse. The difference between the highest degree of *shen* and the lowest of *neng* is obvious: the Competent (*neng*) calligraphers only reach the level of proficiency in techniques, while to achieve the Inspired (*shen*), as Chiang Yee said, requires “years of practice” and besides, “aesthetic insight and innate artistic power” on the part of the calligrapher.<sup>65</sup> The class

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>63</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhong wan tang wudai shulun* 中晚唐五代書論 (Treatises on Calligraphy from the Mid- and Late Tang and the Five Dynasties). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 139, 142.

<sup>64</sup> Translation based on the following two versions: Escande, Yolaine. “Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan’s *Shudian*.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 163; and Chiang, Yee. *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetics and Technique*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973. 220.

<sup>65</sup> Yee, Chiang. *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetics and Technique*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973. 223-224.

of *miao* can be understood as the intermediate level between *shen* and *neng*. The last category *yi* is a rather slippery and contentious one in Chinese art criticism. It is difficult to differentiate *yi* from *shen*; occasionally, *yi* is ranked above *shen*, but more often it is used independently of the other three degrees. In principle, *yi* is employed to designate Chinese artists who don't hold to the conventional rules or patterns. As Susan Nelson concisely put it, “*yi* presumed the artist's complete unpredictability and uniqueness, his disengagement from the genealogies of art history.”<sup>66</sup>

### 5.2.2 *Pin* as a value matrix

Elaborating on the Chinese art classification system, I suggest that the system of *pin* constitutes a unique value matrix in Chinese art discourse, by means of which Chinese scholars, connoisseurs, and art critics assess and rank the cultural, economic, and aesthetic values of different types of paintings and calligraphic works, if not all different artworks. Most likely, such a Chinese theory of *pin* or evaluative classification would captivate a few Western aestheticians like Monroe Beardsley and Nelson Goodman, who, at one time or another, have entertained the idea of comparing or ranking the values of different artworks.<sup>67</sup> As George Dickie said:

If the value of every work could be compared to the value of every other work, then all existing works could be envisaged as ranked in a hierarchical value matrix. We could then assign *specific* values to artworks, saying that those works at the top of the envisaged matrix are *excellent* works, those in the middle are *good* works, those at the bottom are *bad* works, and so on.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Nelson, Susan. “*I-p'in* in Later Painting Criticism.” In Bush, Susan, and Christian Murck, eds. *Theories of the Arts in China*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983. 410. For more discussions on *yi*, see Xu, Fuguan. *Zhongguo yishu jingshen* 中國藝術精神 (The Spirit of Chinese Art). Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2001. 182-196; Wang, Yun. “Yi pin xin shuo” 逸品新說 (A New Theory of Yi Pin). *Guizhou daxue xuebao* 17.2 (2003): 48-52.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Beardsley, Monroe C. “In Defense of Aesthetic Value.” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Associations* 52.6 (1979): 723-749; Vermazen, Bruce. “Comparing Evaluations of Works of Art.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34.1 (1975): 7-14.

<sup>68</sup> Dickie, George. “Aesthetic Evaluation.” In Kelly, Michael, ed. *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*. Vol. 2. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 131.

It's hard not to match the degrees of *excellent* and *good* with the categories of *shen* and *miao* in the Chinese ranking scheme, and it naturally goes that the theory of *pin* or classification provides such a matrix. However, an immediate refutation of such an equivalence is that the focus of the evaluation in the Chinese theory of *pin* is the artists themselves, while the hierarchical matrix imagined by the Western art theorists is used to compare and rank the values of concrete artworks. From the six-century Yu Jianwu's *Shu pin* to the eleventh-century Zhu Changwen's *Xu shuduan*, as I mentioned previously, texts in the tradition of calligraphic classification rank the calligraphers and don't mention any actual calligraphic work. A few Western sinologists also notice such a defect in this kind of evaluation. Escande, for example, wrote that:

The problem of objective evaluation, as conceptualized and aspired to in Europe, is avoided...Chinese art theory does indeed involve an esthetic reflection on evaluation, but its aim differs from that of Western art theory in that it focuses on the subject and not the object.<sup>69</sup>

Escande's remarks can be countered from two perspectives. First, when early art critics such as Yu Jianwu classified the calligraphers, they *did* pay attention to the calligraphers' artistic practice and overall calligraphic style. This is even more manifest when Zhang Huaiguan subdivided the three classes – the Inspired, the Marvellous, and the Competent – into various calligraphic scripts.

A more persuasive response, as made in a recent article by Richard Vinograd, goes that the Chinese evaluative classification has evolved “overtime to focus on works of art as the objects of evaluation.”<sup>70</sup> It's likely that the shift originated in the connoisseurial literature of around the twelfth century. At and after that time, as

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<sup>69</sup> Escande, Yolaine. “Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan's *Shuduan*.” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 161, 165.

<sup>70</sup> Vinograd, Richard. “Classification, Canon, and Genre.” In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 256.



Vinograd observed, ranking categories like *shen* (inspired) and *miao* (excellent) “might appear unsystematically as terms of praise in colophons or poems about painting [and calligraphy].”<sup>71</sup> In a colophon to Dong Yuan’s 董源 (act. 934-962) *Shankou daidu tu* 山口待渡圖 (Awaiting the Ferry at the Foot of the Mountains), the Yuan painter and official connoisseur Ke Jiusi 柯九思 (1290-1343) identified the work presented as an authentic work from Dong, and evaluated it as a real “divine piece” (*shen-pin* 神品). This is not the first time for the ranking categories like *shen* to be used for an actual work. In a colophon to the Northern Song long scroll *Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖 (Along the River during the Qingming Festival), the Jin dynasty scholar Zhang Zhu 張著 (fl. 1186) noted that this scroll should be stored as a divine-class (*shen-pin*) artwork.

In the Ming dynasty, the formal ranking systems within a few art texts – especially painting and calligraphy – start to focus solely on the artworks. For example, in *Minghua shenpin mu* 名畫神品目 (A Catalogue of Famous Paintings Ranked in the *Shen* Class, Fig. 5-1) and *Fatie shenpin mu* 法帖神品目 (A Catalogue of *Shen*-class Calligraphic Works, Fig. 5-2), both produced by the Ming scholar-official Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559), specific works of paintings and calligraphy become the focus of evaluation. In Yang’s catalogue, every work has been designated a title, followed occasionally by the artist’s name, or the location of the work, or nothing. Under a few paintings and calligraphic works, Yang noted that the artist is unknown. I believe that Yang Shen’s work marks an important turn in evaluative texts on Chinese painting and calligraphy. That is, evaluative classification schemes start to rank artworks. When Yang was determined to make a list of the best or the Divine works extant in his day, his primary concern is not the calligraphers or painters, their deeds or career achievements, but the artistic qualities as manifested in their specific artworks.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 257.

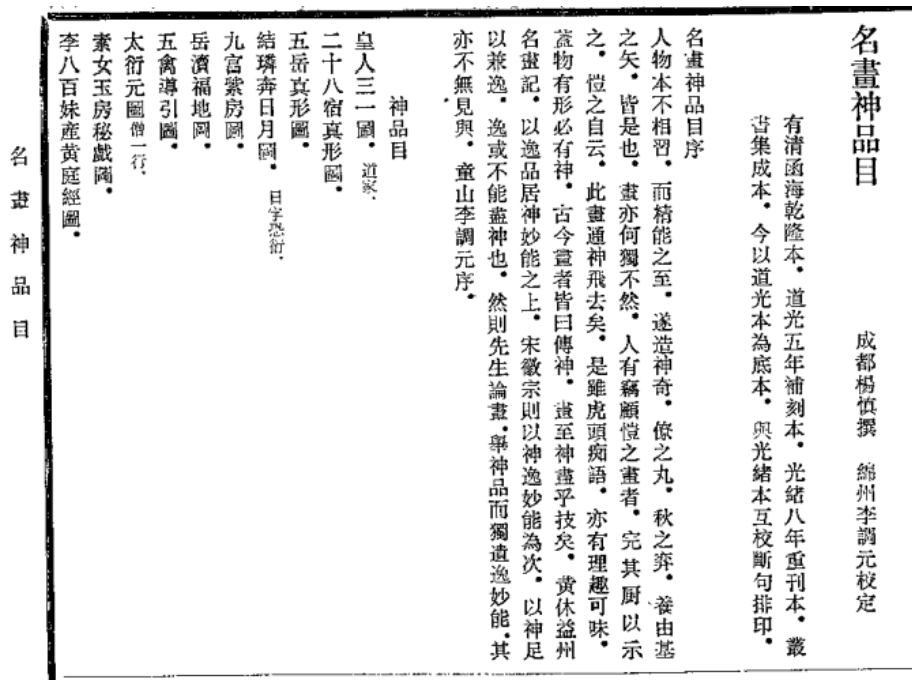


Fig. 5-1. Yang Shen, *Minghua shenpin mu* 名畫神品目. From Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 3. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1992. 821.

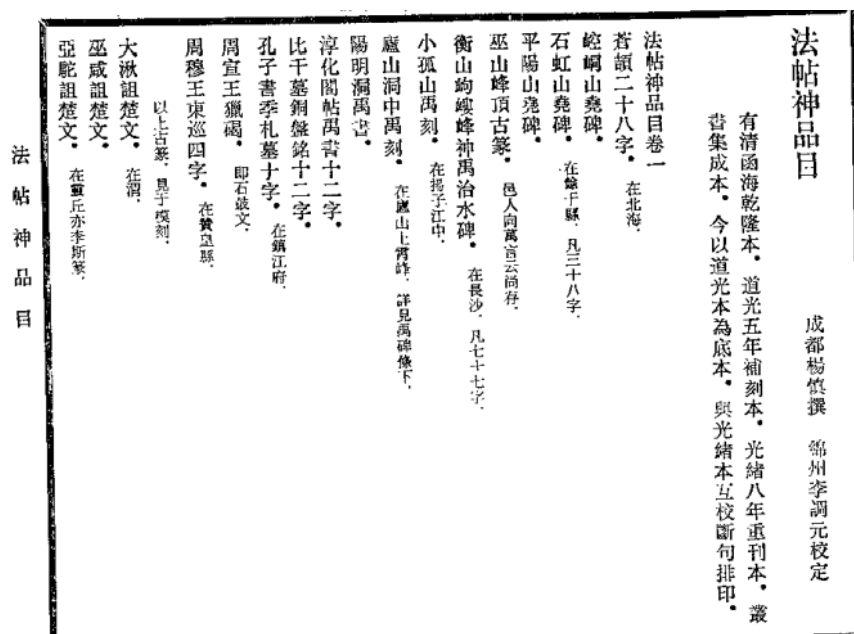


Fig. 5-2. Yang Shen, *Fatie shenpin mu* 法帖神品目. From Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 3. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1992. 825.

Comparing the values of a reservoir of artworks, and then classifying them into hierarchical degrees, are more commonly seen in the post-Ming Chinese art world. As Vinograd noted of the cataloguing of the Qing dynasty imperial collection and the twentieth-century National Palace Museum's collection:

The Qing dynasty imperial painting and calligraphy catalog *Shiqu baoji* (1745) and its companion compilations utilized a simple designation system of “superior category” and “secondary category” to distinguish works worthy of full documentation from those of lesser importance. A similar distinction persisted in to the twentieth century cataloging of the National Palace Museum, in the distinction between the “Principal List” and “Abbreviated List” paintings and calligraphies...Both systems reflect a shift from the artist to the work of art as the focus of evaluation...<sup>72</sup>

In the twentieth century, even contemporary, Chinese museum practice and connoisseurial literature, one can find the ubiquity of the hierarchical evaluative classifications and terms. The theory of *pin* has gradually branched in a new direction, following which Chinese art critics and connoisseurs developed a comparatively reliable value matrix. Such a matrix might be dismissed by a Western art theorist out of hand, as it looks essentially subjective, and those Chinese critics or practitioners of this matrix normally won't describe what makes one artwork more valuable than another one. But, in the meantime, one should be aware that a pure value matrix envisaged by the analytic aestheticians is unlikely to be provided, because in the analytic tradition, as Bruce Vermazen claimed, two artworks can be compared only if they have the same independently valuable property and only that one valuable property.<sup>73</sup>

If we consider the systems of classification and categorisation as open and

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>73</sup> Vermazen, Bruce. “Comparing Evaluations of Works of Art.” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 34.1 (1975): 7-14.

accumulating practices, we may find it not hard to imagine how a Chinese connoisseur ranks and categorises a specific artwork. The above mentioned Yang Shen's *Minghua shenpin mu* (A Catalogue of Famous Paintings Ranked in the *Shen* Class), for example, serves as a reference frame: when a later critic intends to rank a landscape painting in the *shen* or Inspired class, he or she might compare the work being presented to those landscapes listed in Yang's catalogue.

## Conclusion

The Chinese tradition of *pin* or evaluative classification is, as Escande said, "closely related to the centuries-old practice of judging and ranking human beings, especially officials."<sup>74</sup> This explains why some calligraphy theorists include the issue of *pin* in the discussion of *ren shu guanxi* (relation between an artist and his/her calligraphy). Displaying an ethico-aesthetic tendency, Chinese calligraphy theory is indeed "preoccupied with the model artist rather than the artworks", and the Chinese art theorists are indeed interested in the ethical value of the artist.<sup>75</sup> Such an ethico-aesthetic attitude is essential for us to understand the calligraphic evaluative practices in China. Nevertheless, in the latter part of this chapter, I demonstrated that the evaluation and classification of Chinese calligraphy does not always involve the appraisal of the artist. After all, connoisseurs would, from time to time, be presented with nameless paintings and calligraphies. When the Ming dynasty Yang Shen ranked anonymous works such as *Toulao kannian tie* 投老殘年帖 (Notes Written in the Declining Old Years) and *Xuetan hanyan tu* 雪灘寒燕圖 (Snow Shore and Cold Swallows) in the Inspired class, there is no denying the fact that he made a comparatively disinterested value judgement on the beauty of the aesthetic object. I will turn to these issues in the next chapter.

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<sup>74</sup> Escande, Yolaine. "Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan's *Shudian*." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 149.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 160, 166.

## Chapter 6

### Calligraphic Appreciation is Like One Witnessed the Creation

(*ming ru qin du* 明如親睹)

In the last chapter, I discussed the so called “moralism” in the evaluation of Chinese calligraphy, which binds artistic value with the ethical value of the artist. This chapter turns to another attitude adopted by the Chinese towards calligraphy, an attitude, according to Hsiung Ping-Ming, that focuses on the beauty of a calligraphic work per se. The discussion is primarily concerned with the aesthetic object of Chinese calligraphy and the nature of calligraphic appreciation as revealed in classical texts on this art.

#### 6.1 Aesthetic object

Starting with the perceptual object in the appreciation of calligraphy facilitates the following discussion, as this issue immediately touches the unique features that define this art. In the first chapter, I discussed several genres of calligraphic works, such as stele inscriptions and literati’s letters: the aesthetic appreciation of certain qualities observed in them precipitated their identity as *art*. That being said, however, it is safe to assert that the physical stele or letter should be differentiated from the aesthetic objects of them.

Before examining what attracts the attention of Chinese art critics in calligraphic appreciation, it is necessary for us to inquire into the concept of the “aesthetic object”. In Anglophone aesthetics, the term is one of internal tension. The term “aesthetic” worked as “a description of the subjective side of experience”<sup>1</sup>, while “object” can refer

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<sup>1</sup> Townsend, Dabney. *Aesthetic Objects and Works of Art*. Wolfeboro, N.H.: Longwood Academic, 1989. 87.

to any physical thing or entity that could be sensed. When the accent is on the objectivity of the things presented to viewers, the aesthetic object of an artwork would be identical to the work's physical being. If emphasis is put on the subjectivity of the objects of aesthetic experience, an aesthetic object tends to equate with a perceptual object in the sense used by Monroe Beardsley<sup>2</sup>, or an ideal object in the sense of Benedetto Croce. It should be noted that such a tension had been anticipated in Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement. The judgement of taste, according to Kant, "denotes nothing in the object, but is a feeling which the subject has of itself."<sup>3</sup>

All calligraphic creations are based on written characters that could be read as literary text, unless they are unreadable. As mentioned in the fourth chapter, Chinese characters serve as the medium for two major Chinese arts – literature and calligraphy. The former relies on the semantic content of the written characters alone, while the latter highlights their graphic patterns. For poets, as Kao Yu-Kung said, "physical characters are never in themselves as important as their mental counterparts."<sup>4</sup> In calligraphy, by contrast, "apparently the physical presence of the words, not their content, is the object of appreciation."<sup>5</sup> Wen Fong seconded Kao's words by saying that "Before calligraphy could be appreciated as an art form, its formal and aesthetic dimensions had to be recognized as apart from the meaning it communicated as language."<sup>6</sup> Later viewers of Wang Xizhi's calligraphy would not care to know the mundane matters mentioned in his letters and, as Robert Harrist pointed out, "it was the visual effects of these letters, not their contents, that were subjected to aesthetic evaluation."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Beardsley, Monroe. *Aesthetics*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1958. 31-34.

<sup>3</sup> Kant, Immanuel; James Creed Meredith, trans. *Critique of Judgement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. "Chinese Lyric Aesthetics." In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>6</sup> Fong, Wen. "Chinese Calligraphy: Theory and History." In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliot Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

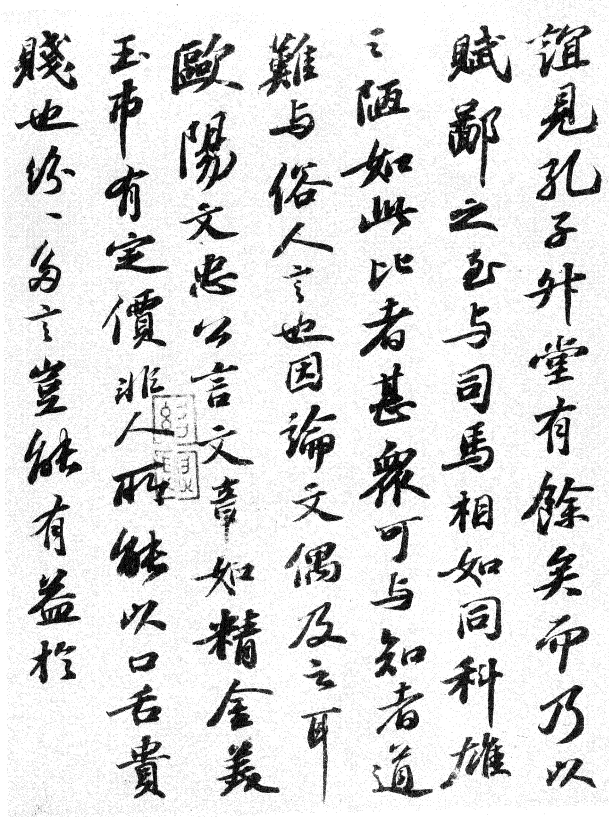


Fig. 6-1. Su Shi, *A Response to Xie Minshi on Prose Writing* (detail), running script, ink on paper, 1100. Mounted on a 27 x 96.5 cm scroll with six colophons. Shanghai Museum.

To explain this, a good place to start is the calligraphic work *Da Xie Minshi lunwen tie* 答謝民師論文帖 (A response to Xie Minshi on Prose Writing, Fig. 6-1), a letter written by Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) to his friend Xie Minshi 謝民師 in 1100. In this letter, Su gave an account of prose writing, which is considered by some literary researchers as “the essence of his lifetime work pertaining to prose writing”.<sup>8</sup> For readers who take this letter as a literary text, the semantic content may become the aesthetic object: understanding Su’s views about the genre of prose could provide aesthetic pleasure. But for viewers who perceive this letter as a calligraphic work, their focus of attention is distinctly different. The many colophons to this artwork – a genre of appraisal postscript written by a critic after viewing a work of painting or calligraphy – exemplify the concerns of the Chinese-trained viewers in appreciating calligraphic works. Lou Jian 婁堅 (1554-1631) wrote in his colophon: “Of all Su’s calligraphic

<sup>8</sup> I, Lo-Fen. “Su Shi yu Xie Minshi tuiguan shu lunxi” 蘇軾與謝民師推官書論析 (A Study of Su Shi’s Letter to Xie Minshi). *Tamkang Journal of Chinese Literature* 27 (2012): 87.

traces I have viewed, only the *Chu song tie* could be compared to this work in terms of the use of the brush; [the brushwork of] that work is a little unrestrained, while [the brushwork of] this work is steady.”<sup>9</sup> Dong Qichang’s 董其昌 (1555-1636) colophon starts with the stylistic provenance of Su’s calligraphy: “Su had Xu Jihai and Wang Sengqian’s calligraphy as his imitative models. Occasionally he studied Li Beihai and Yan Lugong’s calligraphy. All [these master’s calligraphy] could be labelled as unusual and desolate.”<sup>10</sup> It is obvious that the two renowned critics’ appraisal remarks focused on the calligraphic features of this letter, i.e. its brushwork and stylistic provenance, rather than its literary content. For Chinese calligraphy critics, the experience of this letter as a work of calligraphy, and other calligraphic works as well, is a matter of attending to the graphic patterns of the characters. Appreciating (with understanding) the represented content of the writing may generate aesthetic pleasure, but this kind of appreciation is perception of – or reflection on – a literary work rather than a calligraphic work. The literary text of calligraphic works were meaningful to the writer who originally used the writing to express his or her ideas, but it may not, as Bai Qianshen points out, “necessarily be meaningful to its viewers, not least to later viewers whose interests are primarily calligraphic.”<sup>11</sup>

To further elaborate on the dual properties of the characters in works of Chinese calligraphy, I would like to discuss another phenomenon: two or more calligraphic works employing the same characters and hence sharing the same literary content. It is actually very common that some canonical texts, because of their religious, didactic, or literary merits, are especially popular with calligraphers of successive dynasties. One of these popular texts is Su Shi’s *Chibi fu* 赤壁賦 (Rhapsody on the Red Cliff), a famous prose poem that expressed the writer’s reflection on life’s transcendence of time and space. Su composed this text and left a calligraphic work (Fig. 6-2) that employed the prose as its literary content. With an obvious affection towards Su’s insightful

<sup>9</sup> Chinese text: 予所見公遺跡，獨楚頌帖用筆與此相類，彼似少縱而此則穩重。

<sup>10</sup> Chinese text: 東坡書學徐季海、王僧虔，間為李北海、顏魯公，皆奇絕蕭疎。

<sup>11</sup> Bai, Qianshen. “Calligraphy.” In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 321.



writing, two later literati artist – Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322) and Wen Zhengming 文徵明 (1470-1559) – each produced their own calligraphic version of *Chibi fu* (Fig. 6-3, 6-4). We now have three calligraphic works of *Chibi fu* to discuss: Su's own version created in the Song dynasty, Zhao's in Yuan, and Wen's in Ming. The three are no different from one another in terms of the characters used and their literary meaning. Each of them, however, has been viewed as distinct and valuable artworks in the history of calligraphy. This can only be explained by the fact that the three calligraphic versions of *Chibi fu* are different aesthetic objects. The scripts the three calligraphers employed are not all the same: Zhao used his readily recognisable running script while Wen used a meticulous small-standard script. The spatial arrangements of the characters in these three versions are not the same: Wen put every character within a square, thus every column has same number of characters, while there is no set number of each column's characters in Su and Zhao's works. The forms of the characters and the expressive qualities within the three works also are not the same: Su's calligraphy has been identified as being steady and robust, Zhao's being smooth and easy-going, and Wen's gentle and elegant.

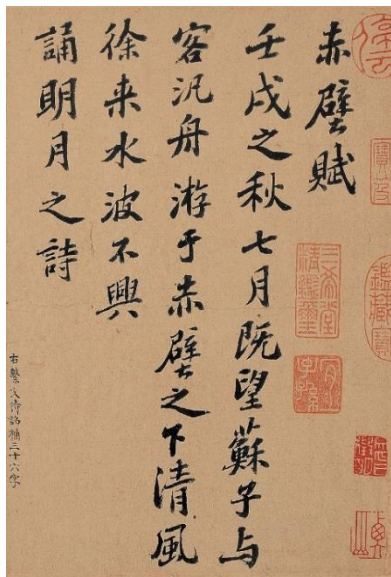


Fig. 6-2, Su Shi, *Chibi fu* (detail), ink on paper, 23.9 x 258 cm. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

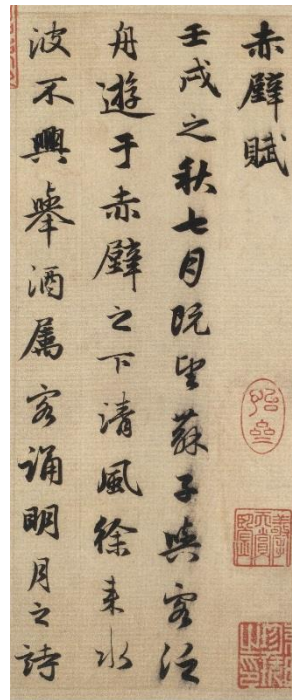


Fig. 6-3, Zhao Mengfu, *Chibi fu* (detail), album leaves, ink on paper. National Palace Museum, Taipei.

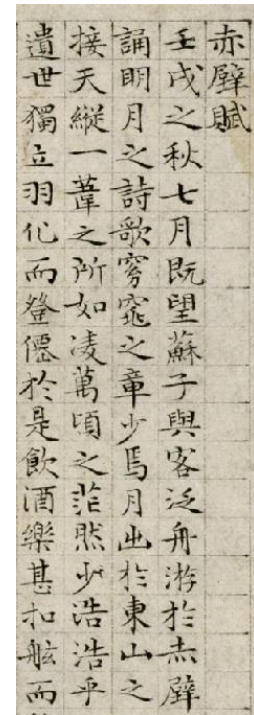


Fig. 6-4, Wen Zhengming, *Chibi fu* (detail), ink on paper, 24.9 x 18.8 cm. Palace Museum, Beijing.

In Chinese calligraphy criticism, as Harrist noted, the distinction between the graphic pattern of the characters and the literary content in a calligraphic work has become a given.<sup>12</sup> The above mentioned two art connoisseurs Dong Qichang and Lou Jian, in their appraisal remarks on Su Shi's work, devoted their attention to Su's calligraphic training and style. Calligraphy historians since Tang, such as Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 (act. 713-741) and Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1039-1098), have been mainly interested in calligraphers' calligraphic attainments while writing their brief biographies. However, in recent years the role of the text in calligraphic appreciation has aroused the awareness of some scholars. According to Bai Qianshen,

<sup>12</sup> Harrist, Robert. "Reading Chinese Calligraphy." In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliot Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 6.

“if the text of a calligraphic work was new, special, comprehensible, or interesting to a viewer, the viewer would read it...reading and viewing became integrated into one process.”<sup>13</sup> There is a strong presence or persistence of the semantic meanings of words in calligraphic appreciation, as Harrist suggested.<sup>14</sup> The appreciation of Su Shi’s calligraphy *A Response to Xie Minshi on Prose Writing* (Fig. 6-1) is inevitably accompanied with the reading of the text. This unity of the experience of text-reading and calligraphy-viewing is not readily applicable to some types of calligraphic works, such as the wild cursive script, that are rather difficult for common viewers to read. But for calligraphic works that contain easily recognisable characters, I argue, the viewer’s reading of the text greatly influences the phenomenology of his or her experience of the calligraphy, and one of the reasons lies in that the temporal progression in calligraphic appreciation is also inherent in the temporality of literary text (that is constituted of Chinese characters with a sequence of strokes) and its interpretation. As Lothar Ledderose put it:

[the] Chinese calligrapher is always required to produce a readable text and must strictly adhere to a certain sequence of strokes, the viewer can follow with his eye the exact movements of the brush through the strokes, the characters and the lines from beginning to end.<sup>15</sup>

What, then, are the objects of calligraphic appreciation? The physical object is certainly not a satisfactory answer. In traditional Chinese calligraphy criticism, the issue of the aesthetic object is addressed in another way. Closely reading the critical Chinese texts on this art, one can find that Chinese calligraphy critics, like Lou Jian and Dong Qichang, are very clear about what they should attend to in calligraphic appreciation.

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<sup>13</sup> Bai, Qianshen. “Calligraphy.” In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 321.

<sup>14</sup> Harrist, Robert. “Reading Chinese Calligraphy.” In Harrist, Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliot Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. “Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function.” *Oriental Art* 17.10 (1986): 35.

As the Ming dynasty scholar Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585-1645) noted:

觀古法書……先觀用筆結體，精神照應，次觀人為天巧、自然強作。<sup>16</sup>

When about to observe an antique scroll...one should first see whether the brush work is strong and real and whether it is in harmony with the spirit [of the artist]. In the second place one should assess the natural talent of the artist and see whether his work shows the strength that is testified by a free handling of the brush.<sup>17</sup>

Calligraphic appreciation, according to Wen, involves bringing into awareness calligraphic works' brushwork or formal qualities and their spiritual or inner qualities. To put it in another way, the aesthetic objects in the experience of a calligraphic work are twofold: the outer form and the inner qualities.<sup>18</sup> The twofoldness of the aesthetic object in the appreciation of Chinese calligraphy – and Chinese pictorial arts at large – is by no means new to the seventeenth century. In an early painting text, the six-century art critic Xie He introduced the influential “Six Laws” of Chinese painting, the first two of which being “animation through spirit consonance” (*qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動) and “structural method in use of the brush” (*gufa yongbi* 骨法用筆).<sup>19</sup> These two standards are of great significance for both later Chinese painters and critics, as a Chinese painter should endeavour to convey, and an art critic should focus awareness upon, structural strength and the operations of spirit.

It should be noted that the “spirit” (*jingshen* 精神) of calligraphy as discussed by Wen and the “spirit consonance” (*qiyun* 氣韻) of painting raised by Xie do not belong

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<sup>16</sup> Wen, Zhenheng; Chen Zhi, comm. *Changwu zhi jiaozhu* 長物志校注 (Treatise on Superfluous Things Annotated). Nanjing: Jiangsu kexue jishu chubanshe, 1984. 136.

<sup>17</sup> Translation based on: van Gulik, Robert H. *Chinese Pictorial Art as Viewed by the Connoisseur*. Rome: Serie Orientale Roma, 1958. 368.

<sup>18</sup> This is analogous to what Carroll understood as the object of aesthetic experience, i.e. the formal and/or expressive properties. Carroll, Noël. “Recent Approaches to Aesthetic Experience.” *The Journal of Aesthetic and Art Criticism* 70.2 (2012): 173.

<sup>19</sup> It is generally believed that these two principles are also applicable to calligraphic appreciation. Translation based on Soper, Alexander C. “The First Two Laws of Hsieh Ho.” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 8 (1949): 423.

to a same type of inner quality, as the former is concerned with the spirit of the work as expressed by the calligrapher, while the latter, according to the modern scholar Qian Zhongshu, is nothing other than the liveliness and animation of the objects being represented in a painting.<sup>20</sup> But, we should not forget about the shared concern in the appreciation of Chinese calligraphy and painting – the brushwork or the form. In the aesthetics of Chinese painting and calligraphy, the spiritual liveliness of an artwork relies on its formal expressiveness, hence Gu Kaizhi’s dictum “to describe spirit through form” (*yi xing xie shen* 以形寫神). The appreciation of both Chinese calligraphy and painting requires the viewer attend to the *xing* (form) and the *shen* (spirit), or the work’s formal properties and its expressive properties.

Since the Tang dynasty, it is a commonplace that calligraphy critics set up a distinction between the formal and the expressive properties of a calligraphic work. As Ronald Egan observed:

T’ang writers use various pairs of contrasting terms to distinguish between the outer, formal aspect, and the inner, spiritual or emotive one. These include *tsu-hsing* 字形 (the shape of the characters) vs. *shen-ts’ai* 神彩 (their vitality), *hsing-shih* 形勢 (the formal appearance of the characters) vs. *ku-li* 骨力 (their internal strength), *shou* 手 (the hand or technique of the calligrapher) vs. *hsin* 心 (his heart), and *t’i* 體 (form) vs. *ch’ing* 情 (sentiment).<sup>21</sup>

In Egan’s summation, the characters’ shapes and the overall formal properties in a calligraphic work – caused by the hand’s movement of the calligrapher – amount to the outer formal aspect of a work, while the internal strength within the form and the spiritual vitality flowing out of the whole work, which is the result of the creative subject’s mind and the expression of his or her sentiment, constitute a work’s inner

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<sup>20</sup> Qian, Zhongshu; Ronald Egan, trans. *Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Egan, Ronald. “Ou-yang Hsiu and Su Shih on Calligraphy.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 49.2 (1989): 385-386.

expressive aspect.

A more interesting point implied in Egan's passage – and prevalent in calligraphy criticism as well – is that the inner aspect of Chinese calligraphy consists of two parts: one is the force or vigour manifested in a calligraphic work, the other the calligrapher's sentiment and mind. The former concerns the expressive qualities of a calligraphic work, while the latter involves the mental, spiritual aspects of the creative artist, and each of the two has long been regarded as the inner properties of a work of calligraphy. This "twofoldness" of the inner qualities of Chinese calligraphy touches upon an important feature of the art: a person's personality and mind can be reflected in his or her calligraphy. The man's "spirit and feeling" (*shenqing* 神情), his "drift" or "flavor" (*qu* 趣), according to Egan, could pass from "the personality of the man to this calligraphy", becoming "the criterion by which the art should be judged."<sup>22</sup> It is here that the integration of the aesthetic and non-aesthetic judgement, the aesthetic value and "human value"<sup>23</sup> of Chinese calligraphy begin to emerge.

That practising calligraphy has traditionally been regarded as a way of "self-cultivation" for Chinese literati can be used to account for the transferring of calligraphers' personality to their brushwork. As Bai Qianshen said:

It was thought that the practice of calligraphy could improve one's character in multiple ways: greater control of one's mood and temperament, and therefore greater equanimity in thought. This more cultivated mind eventually would be reflected in one's calligraphy, but it had to become second nature, and in art, as in music and skating or chess, that can be achieved only through daily practice.<sup>24</sup>

Calligraphic training here acted as a bridge between the two parts of the inner aspect in calligraphic appreciation. On one hand, daily training helps cultivate gradually

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 401.

<sup>23</sup> I borrowed this term from Yolaine Escande. See, Escande, Yolaine. "Tang Dynasty Aesthetic Criteria: Zhang Huaiguan's *Shuduan*." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 41.1-2 (2014): 148-169.

<sup>24</sup> Bai, Qianshen. "Calligraphy." In Powers, Martin J., and Katherine R. Tsiang, eds. *A Companion to Chinese Art*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley Blackwell, 2016. 319.

a person's body and mind. On the other, it is through lengthy bodily training that a person's calligraphy can reach a level where it can capture his or her slightest psychophysiological propensity. This key feature of Chinese calligraphy is obvious if we take the expressive qualities manifested in a calligraphic work as a contributing factor to the work's individual style. An artist's individual style, as suggested in Meyer Schapiro's seminal article, is the artist's personality made visible.<sup>25</sup> Richard Wollheim, in differentiating "general style" and "individual style", contended that the latter possesses "psychological reality"<sup>26</sup>, by which he meant that individual styles are expressive of a personality: they are internal to an artist, and they are explicable in terms of some individual artist's psychology or expressive aims.<sup>27</sup>

It seems to be a universally accepted idea that one meaning of the style of an artwork is inseparable from the "style" of the creative artist. In light of this, it is thus easy to understand why, in Chinese calligraphy criticism, the terminologies used to describe the expressive qualities of calligraphy are adopted from terms used in the appraisal of people. The above mentioned *jingshen*, *shenqing*, *qu* – being common terms in the judgement of people – are pervasive in calligraphy criticism that connote the inner aspect of calligraphic works.

There is no consensus among contemporary aestheticians concerning which of the two aspects of the aesthetic object – the outer formal features and the inner expressive qualities – is more important. In calligraphy aesthetics, however, it is unanimous that the latter deserves more attention in calligraphic judgement. The eighth-century art critic Zhang Huaiguan 張懷瓘 famously put it that:

深識書者，惟觀神彩，不見字形。<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Shapiro, Meyer. "Style". In Kroeber, Alfred Louis, ed. *Anthropology Today: An Encyclopedic Inventory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953. 287.

<sup>26</sup> Wollheim, Richard. "Pictorial Style: Two Views." In Lang, Berel, ed. *The Concept of Style*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1979. 134-135.

<sup>27</sup> Lamarque, Peter. *Work and Object: Explorations in the Metaphysics of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 143.

<sup>28</sup> Pan Yungao, ed. *Zhang Huaiguan shulun* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan's Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 228.

Those who know calligraphy profoundly observe only its spiritual brilliance and do not see the forms of characters.<sup>29</sup>

Zhang's view is another affirmation of the twofoldness of the aesthetic objects in calligraphic appreciation, and he made it clear that *shencai*, or spiritual brilliance, is the determining factor in judging a work. Despite this, Zhang didn't claim that calligraphic form should be ignored altogether. For some other calligraphy critics, the calligraphic form, along with the creative subject's personal characteristics, also influences the *shencai* of calligraphic works. As the Ming dynasty scholar Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) wrote:

有功無性，神彩不生；有性無功，神彩不實。<sup>30</sup>

With technical attainments but lacking disposition, the spiritual brilliance [of calligraphic works] won't emerge. With disposition but lacking technical attainments, the spiritual brilliance won't be substantive.

Though Yang didn't mention the concept of form here, we can understand the term *gong* – literally meaning “effort”, translated above as “technical attainments” – as acquisition of the calligraphic skills which involves the pursuit of formal perfection. *Xing* or a person's disposition, here as antithesis of *gong*, is concerned with the subjectivity in calligraphic creation and the inner aspect of the aesthetic objects in calligraphic appreciation. Yang attached equal importance to *xing* and *gong*. Without the former, a calligraphic work won't display expressive qualities. But if without the latter, an aesthetically competent observer of this art would doubt the genuineness of a work's expressive qualities.

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<sup>29</sup> Translation cited from Harist, Robert. “Reading Chinese Calligraphy.” In Harist Robert, and Wen Fong, eds. *The Embodied Image: Chinese Calligraphy from the John B. Elliott Collection*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1999. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Mingdai shulun* 明代書論 (Ming Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002. 63.



## 6.2 Zhenyan or genuine eyes

I have in the last section divided the aesthetic objects in calligraphic works into the outer formal properties and the inner spiritual qualities. If we understand aesthetic appreciation as attention to – and the apprehension of – aesthetic objects, it is tenable to say that calligraphic appreciation is the perception and grasping of the calligraphic form and the spiritual qualities in calligraphic works. The following discussion considers how Chinese art critics understand the activity of appreciation, or to be precise, of “true appreciation” (*zhenshang* 真賞). It is worthwhile to start with this issue before a practical study of calligraphic appreciation, as it lurks in the background and involves the right attitude or right method of viewing calligraphy, and even painting, in China. In an insightful paragraph of *Shufa ya yan* 書法雅言 (A Faithful Narrative of Calligraphy), an important Ming dynasty treatise on calligraphy, Xiang Mu 項穆 (fl. 1590) wrote:

能書者固絕真手，善鑒者甚罕真眼也……有耳鑒，有目鑒，有心鑒。若遇卷初展，邪正得失，何手何代，明如親睹，不俟終閱，此謂識書之神，心鑒也。若據若賢有若帖，其卷在某處，不恤貨財而遠購焉，此盈錢之徒收藏以誇耀，耳鑒也。若開卷未玩意法，先查跋語誰賢，紙墨不辨古今，隻據印章孰賞，聊指幾筆，虛口重讚，此目鑒也。<sup>31</sup>

With regard to calligraphic creation, there is a lack of master-hands. Among those who are good at calligraphic appreciation, there is a rarity of genuine eyes... [When it comes to appreciation,] there is appreciation by the ears, appreciation by the eyes, and appreciation by the mind. If one, while meeting an unrolling scroll, perceives immediately the negative and positive properties

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<sup>31</sup> Xiang, Mu. *Shufa ya yan* 書法雅言 (A Faithful Narrative of Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Mingdai shulun* 明代書論 (Ming Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002. 256-257.

of the work, its author and era, just as the viewer witnesses [the calligrapher's creation], this can be called identifying the calligraphy's *shen* (spirit) or *xinjian* (judging by the mind). If one judges the calligraphic work according to its previous prestigious ownership and whereabouts, and never grudges money for possessing the work, such a doing is typical of those moneyed people who show off their collections. This is called *erjian* (judging by the ears). In the first place when a calligraphic work unfolds, if one looks up the authors of inscriptions and judges the work by the collectors' seals, rather than contemplating the work's *yi* (ideas) and *fa* (techniques) and identifying its paper and ink, we can use *mujian* (judging by the eyes) to describe this type of appreciation with which the viewer only factitiously praises some random brush lines.

Xiang Mu has made several notable points here. His differentiation of three types of viewing calligraphy – *xinjian*, *erjian*, and *mujian* – is reminiscent of some ideas in Western aesthetics. *Xinjian* or judging by the mind is regarded as the right attitude or right method of interpreting calligraphy as opposed to *erjian* (judging by the ear) and *mujian* (judging by the eyes). Employing the method of *xinjian*, a critic independently contemplates the calligraphic work being presented, departing from the pre-existing judgement of the work and the author's fame, which, as understood by David Hume, preserves the critic's mind "free from all *prejudice*".<sup>32</sup> Implicit in Xiang Mu's denunciation of *erjian* and *mujian* and his favour of *xinjian* is that viewers with *xinjian* adopt a disinterested attitude that conditions non-partisan judgement.

It is necessary to examine what Xiang Mu exactly means by these three kinds of calligraphic appreciation. *Erjian* is an utterly ridiculous type, as the viewer's judgement is based on hearsay and, according to Xiang's description, doesn't attend to the presented calligraphic work at all. If the term *mujian*, judging by the eyes, sounds a perfectly correct way of artistic appreciation, for our appreciation of the visual arts like

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<sup>32</sup> Hume, David. "Of the Standard of Taste". In Neill, Alex, and Aaron Ridley, eds. *The Philosophy of Art: Readings Ancient and Modern*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995. 262.

painting and calligraphy naturally resorts to our visual perception, it is also obvious that the object of visual perception (*mujian*), as described by Xiang Mu, is not the aesthetic object of a calligraphic work, but the persons – the connoisseurs, the collectors, and the critics – involved in the history of the work. In the case of *mujian*, a viewer's judgement thus follows those of celebrated persons.<sup>33</sup> In this regard, there is no real difference between *erjian* and *mujian* because neither of them pays attention to the aesthetic objects of calligraphic works. One of Xiang's accusations against *mujian* is that those viewers employing *mujian* don't actually contemplate a work's *yi* 意 (ideas) and *fa* 法 (techniques). These two terms can be regarded as another pair that denotes the twofoldness of the aesthetic objects in calligraphic appreciation: *fa*, meaning “techniques” and “rules”, appertains to the formal aspects; and *yi*, as I discussed in the fourth chapter, is bound up with emotion and the subject's aesthetic ideal, and accordingly it is relevant to a calligraphic work's inner expressive aspect.

For Xiang, genuine calligraphic appreciation, i.e., *xinjian*, relies on the study and taste of a work's *fa* and *yi*. Though Xiang did not use these two exact terms in his account of *xinjian*, under close reading it is not difficult to find that *xinjian* inevitably involves the examination of the two aspects of a calligraphic work's aesthetic object. A necessary condition for the realisation of *xinjian*, Xiang believed, is that the viewer identifies a work's *shen* or spirit, and *shen*, as mentioned in last section, is precisely the term that in the aesthetics of calligraphy epitomises the expressive properties within calligraphic works.

To a Western mind, a work's *shen* or spirit might sound rather elusive and metaphysical. In the 1960s, Thomas Munro discussed the different approaches Western and “Oriental” aesthetics take to artistic appreciation:

As to appreciation, we in the West again emphasize objective aspects. We ask

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<sup>33</sup> Xiang Mu would disagree with David Hume's conception of the “true judges”. For Hume, “a true judge in the finer arts is observed...to be so rare a character: Strong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice, can alone entitle critics to [the] valuable character [of a true judge]; and the joint verdict of such, wherever they are to be found, is the true standard of taste and beauty.” See *ibid.*, 264.

students to learn about the history of art and how to distinguish the various styles. We ask them to notice carefully the lines and colors or the melodies and chords which are coming to us from “out there” in the work of art. We say little to the student about putting himself into the right state of mind to enjoy and sympathize with the work of art...[Eastern aesthetics] distinguish, as we have seen, a great variety of desirable qualities in aesthetic experience, at which both artist and appreciator may aim...Our Western tendency, in other words, is to objectify and externalize the inner life...Eastern subjectivism, on the contrary, tends to turn attention inward and away from the world of sensory phenomena.<sup>34</sup>

Munro’s observation, when read with a reference to Xiang’s account of *xinjian*, is partly right and partly wrong. For Xiang, viewing with the mind (*xinjian*) is not at all a mysterious method of appreciation. It requires the viewer ascertain a calligraphic work’s author and its approximate era, which can only be reached via closely looking the objective formal aspects of the work. This means that one must have broad knowledge of the history and styles of this art to be able to employ the appreciative method of *xinjian*. The outer features of a calligraphic work, as I said above, affect a work’s expressive force, and thus is not entirely “out there” in Chinese calligraphy in the sense that Munro would have it. This explains why Xiang related perceiving a work’s positive and negative features, and determining its author and era, to the identification of the calligraphy’s *shen* (spirit).

In describing the mental experience of perceiving *shen*, Xiang used the expression *ming ru qin du* 明如親睹, “as clear as one witnessed [the calligraphic creation].” This is an interesting term: a trained appreciator is not just looking at a calligraphic work, but reproducing mentally the creative process of the work. It is at this point that Munro’s conceptualisation of “Eastern subjectivism” makes some sense. His account of an Indian spectator’s experience of a drama is agreeably applicable to the case of Chinese calligraphy:

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<sup>34</sup> Munro, Thomas. *Oriental Aesthetics*. Cleveland: The Press of Western Reserve University, 1965. 69-70.

Indian aestheticians put more emphasis on...how he can gradually adopt an attitude of detachment from ordinary life and readiness to identify himself in imagination with some of the characters in the situation represented.<sup>35</sup>

The only difference lies in that an appreciator of calligraphy, unlike spectators of a drama, projects his or her mind to a “still” work - the result of a past performance, and try to identify him- or herself in imagination with the artist’s inner attitudes as manifested in the progressive lines. Genuine appreciation of calligraphy, according to Xiang, has its source in visual perception, but it tends to stress the mental faculties such as “imagination” on the part of a viewer, hence the term *xinjian* – judging by mind. In the texts on Chinese literature, calligraphy, and painting, genuine appreciation is never only about the visual perception, rather it emphasises the imaginative interaction between a reader or a viewer and the work presented.<sup>36</sup>

### 6.3 Calligraphic appreciation as retrieval

The above discussion of *xinjian* has already outlined that calligraphic appreciation involves visual perception and mental engagement. This section explores further the process of coming to understand calligraphic works and the characteristics of such a process. I understand a critic’s process of appreciating a particular work of calligraphy to be a kind of *retrieval*, a term I adopt from Richard Wollheim’s characterisation of art criticism:

Criticism is *retrieval*. The task of criticism is the reconstruction of the creative process, where the creative process must in turn be thought of as something not

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>36</sup> In the case of Chinese literary appreciation, a critic’s valuation of poetry, as Eugene Eoyang remarked, “depends as much on the inclination (*disponibilité*) of the critic toward the work as on the inherent characteristics of the work itself.” See, Eoyang, Eugene. *The Transparent Eye: Reflections on Translation, Chinese Literature, and Comparative Poetics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1993. 226-227.

stopping short of, but terminating on, the work of art itself. The creative process reconstructed, or retrieval complete, the work is then open to understanding.<sup>37</sup>

It's not hard to see that Wollheim's identifying art criticism with retrieval highlights a causal relation between creative process and the artwork, i.e., the result of the creative process. With regard to Chinese calligraphy, the two activities or phases of calligraphic creation and calligraphic appreciation are interlinked with each other. On one hand, some types of calligraphic practice per se involve appreciation. When a calligrapher imitates canonical works, he or she needs to view closely the original work, i.e., *du tie*, capturing the calligraphic ideas as well as the brushwork, before and during the actual writing. This process mobilises both the eye and the hand, necessitating the coordination of understanding the original work and creating one's own work. And the other way round, it is often the case that an incisive calligraphic critic needs to have practical experience of calligraphic creation in order to possess genuine appreciative skills. As Ledderose observed, "For centuries, every calligrapher had to master exactly the same technical problems and his personal experience thus enabled him to evaluate the technical accomplishment of other calligraphers."<sup>38</sup> I will further discuss the second aspect later this chapter.

According to Wollheim, an immediate objection to the view that criticism is retrieval is that "it is beyond the bounds of practical possibility to reconstruct the creative process."<sup>39</sup> But when it comes to the criticism or appreciation of Chinese calligraphy, in one sense, the activity of retrieval is not only a practical possibility, but a requisite. I discussed in the fourth chapter that a key feature of this art and its appreciation lies in the temporality of the creative process. All practitioners of calligraphy need to abide by a set sequence of strokes in the execution of every character, and once a line is put on the paper, a calligrapher is discouraged to modify it.

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<sup>37</sup> Wollheim, Richard. *Art and Its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 185.

<sup>38</sup> Ledderose, Lothar. "Chinese Calligraphy: Its Aesthetic Dimension and Social Function." *Orientalism* 17.10 (1986): 40.

<sup>39</sup> Wollheim, Richard. *Art and Its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 186.

Calligraphic creation is a process of linear progression, and a work of calligraphy, as a termination and presentation of the creative process, can thus be regarded as an imprint of a calligrapher's successive physical movements, as successive lines. This feature of temporality constitutes a pivot on which the calligraphic creation and appreciation can engage in dialogue, and this is precisely what Xiang Mu meant by *ming ru qin du*, "as clear as one witnessed [the calligraphic creation]" in his description of genuine appreciation. A creator of a calligraphic work and a trained viewer of the same work can normally arrive at a general agreement on the sequence of strokes. And only if the viewer starts to put herself or himself in the position of the creator, and reproduces in her or his mind the actual creative process, the linear progression of the brush and the linkage between the brushstrokes, a calligraphic work is open to understanding. As the Qing dynasty scholar-artist Da Chongguang 笈重光 (1623-1692) wrote:

慾知多力，觀其使運中途。何謂豐筋？察其紐絡一路。<sup>40</sup>

To understand the force [within a calligraphic work], one needs to observe the progression of the brushwork. What is meant by a work's full sinew? One needs to discern the linking and twining [of the brushstrokes].

To view calligraphic criticism or appreciation as retrieval is, in a sense, to take the creative process as the critical object. But appreciation, as I discussed earlier, involves concentration on the aesthetic objects. These two views of appreciation lay emphasis on two different aspects. When the focus is on the aesthetic object, appreciation is about perception of comparatively stable works or material things. When the focus is shifted to the creative process, appreciation depends on the appreciator's empathy with the artist's experience in creating the work presented to awareness. These two views of appreciation are compatible with each other if one considers the causal relation between

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<sup>40</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Qing qianqi shulun* 清前期書論 (Early Qing Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2003. 159-160.

the creative process and the aesthetic object. Simply put, the aesthetic object is the termination of the creative process. With regard to Chinese calligraphy, I have introduced various categories that refer to the inner aspect of calligraphic works, such as *shen* 神 (spirit), *yi* 意 (intention; idea), and *diao* 調 (individuality). Terms like these, or the expressive features of calligraphy, point to the subjectivity of the artist. To grasp the aesthetic object of calligraphic works, to capture especially the spirit or idea behind the calligraphic forms, it is thus required that a critic envisage its creation.

To enquire further into calligraphic appreciation, we need to examine properly the critic's envisaging of the calligraphic creative process. For Wollheim, this approach of questioning – viewing criticism as retrieval – necessarily touches upon the relationship between interpretation and the artist's intentions:

In recording an artist's intention the critic must state it from the artist's point of view or in terms to which the artist could give conscious or unconscious recognition. The critic must concur with the artist's intentionality.<sup>41</sup>

For Wollheim, the artist's intention is subject to various factors, such as aesthetic norms, the medium, traditions, etc. These factors, however, don't directly account for a calligrapher's intentions during the calligraphic creation, a process I characterised in the fourth chapter as a psychosomatic phenomenon. The concept of *qi* 氣 in Yu-Kung Kao's lyrical aesthetics of calligraphy, I contend, is suitable for us to understand the relationship between calligraphic interpretation and the calligrapher's intentions. According to Kao, the process of calligraphic creation can be understood as successive "physical realization of an internal intention"<sup>42</sup>, of an intentional force (*qi* 氣) which "directs the artist to fulfill his plan."<sup>43</sup> Three aspects – the configurational force (*qi*) on the part of a calligrapher during the creative process, the calligrapher's physical action,

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<sup>41</sup> Wollheim, Richard. *Art and Its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 201.

<sup>42</sup> Kao, Yu-Kung. "Chinese Lyric Aesthetics." In Murck, Alfreda, and Wen Fong, eds. *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy, and Painting*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. 75.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.



and the imprint of the artist's movement, i.e., the progressive lines left on the writing surface – constitute an isomorphic structure. And by virtue of this structure, appreciators of Chinese calligraphy are able to envisage the artist's bodily movement, his or her mental inclination through tracing the progression of calligraphic lines.

To clarify this point, it is useful to examine one piece of calligraphy considered to be a masterpiece – Xu Wei's 徐渭 (1521-1593) *Sanjiang yegui shi zhou* 三江夜歸詩軸 (Returning Late from an Outing, Fig. 6-5). This work contains four columns, and Xu's creation, and a critic's viewing of it, starts with the top right character – 吳 (*wu*) – in the rightmost column, and ends with the bottom left character – 身 (*shen*) – in the leftmost column. Along the second column are labelled four strokes through which a trained viewer may envisage the actual situations Xu got into when he produced them. The first is a sweeping downward line on which one can easily detect a node that doesn't normally appear on Xu's other brushstrokes. This node may be caused by Xu's sudden press of the brush tip, followed by a quick lifting. The brushwork above and below this node is of equal width, and it's hard to tell whether Xu intentionally created it or he considered it inappropriate. The second is a right downward stroke that can be divided into two contrasting halves – the first half is in dark and solid ink, and the second dry and hollow. It is evident that Xu's brush got so dry that he had to dip it in the ink before he wrote the next stroke (labelled as the third). The fourth elongated stroke is the most noticeable line in this work, extending boldly to the bottom of the paper; it is not a conventional brushwork for a vertical line in this script. Roughly from its middle point, this long line continues downward with rhythmic vertical dots, based on which we can envisage the controlled and swift movement of the calligrapher's hand and brush. This willful movement, along with its result – this highly individualised line, seems to be a reckless expression of the artist's strong sentiment at that particular moment.

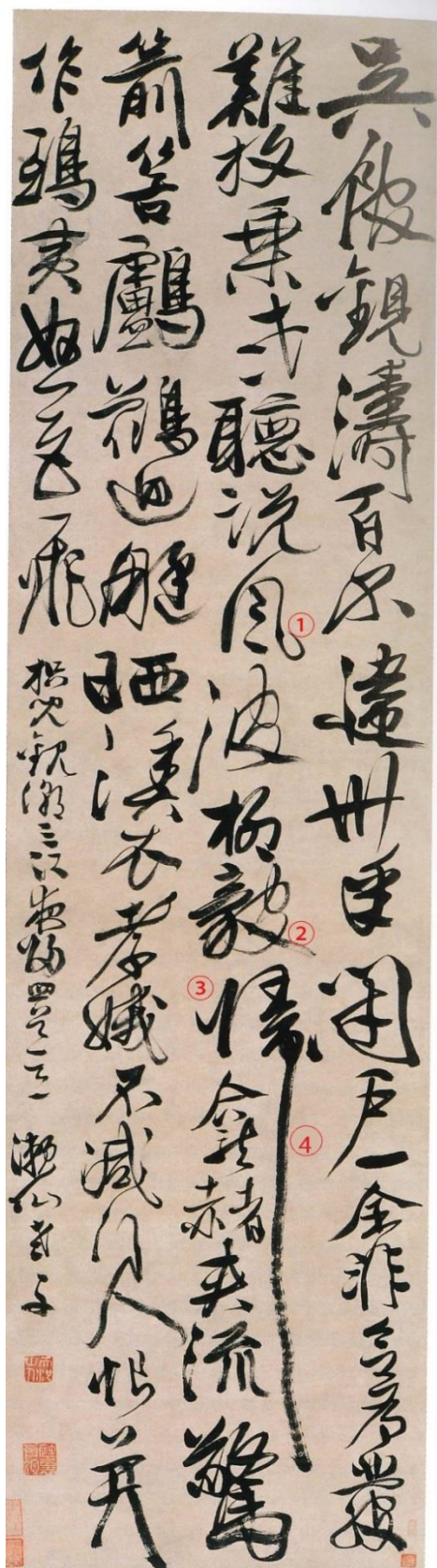


Fig. 6-5, Xu Wei, *Returning Late from an Outing*,  
running cursive, ink on paper. 127 x 32 cm.  
Nanjing Museum, Jiangsu Province.

For Wollheim, the process of retrieval or the reconstruction of the creative process requires the critic enter into correspondence with the artist's intention, but not necessarily "concur with the artist's intentionality."<sup>44</sup> Given this, the perfect critic of an artwork might rightly be the artist who created it, as he or she knows better than anybody else his or her physical movements, intentions, and mental experience. In Chinese calligraphy criticism, some theorists also advanced that a calligrapher should be the first appreciator of his or her own work. It is believed that appreciating one's own work is conducive to the betterment of future calligraphic creation. As the Qing dynasty calligrapher Song Cao 宋曹 (1620-1701) wrote:

凡書成，宜自觀其體勢。<sup>45</sup>

In general, when a calligraphic work is completed, it is proper for the calligrapher him- or herself to contemplate its form and the force running through the form.

I do not advocate a relativism of judgement in Chinese calligraphy. The calligraphic judgements might be relative to the individuals of a certain time and situations, but there is also no denying that some judgements are finer than others. It is a common phenomenon in calligraphy criticism that the same appreciator, at various times, comes to significantly different judgements on the same piece of calligraphy, but many recall that a later judgement or interpretation is not just more sensible, but "correct". As the Song scholar Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-1072) recorded his change of judgement on Li Yong's 李邕 (675-747) calligraphy:

余始得李邕書，不甚好之……及看之久，遂為他書少及者，得之最晚，好

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<sup>44</sup> Wollheim, Richard. *Art and Its Objects: With Six Supplementary Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 201.

<sup>45</sup> Song, Cao. *Shufa yueyan* 書法約言 (Compendious Remarks on Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Qing qianqi shulun* 清前期書論 (Early Qing Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2003. 53.

之尤篤。<sup>46</sup>

Shortly after I obtained Li Yong's calligraphy, I don't quite like it...After viewing it for a long time, I believe that few people's calligraphy is as good as his. My understanding of his calligraphy comes last, but I'm particularly fond of his work.

In his casual calligraphic notes, Wu Dexuan 吳德旋 (1767-1840) jotted down a similar experience:

十年前見楊少師書，了不知其佳處何在。近習步虛詞數十過，乃知後來蘇、黃、米、董諸公，無不仿佛其意度者。<sup>47</sup>

When I beheld Yang Shaoshi's calligraphy ten years ago, I couldn't find any excellence therein at all. Only recently I have practised calligraphy by imitating his *Buxu ci* (Pacing the Void) dozens of times, and I understand that later calligraphers like Su Shi, Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu, and Dong Qichang, all without exception, follow his style and artistic intent.

In the above two examples, the two literati critics' judgements of the calligraphic work presented to them fundamentally changed. And it is not hard to discern that the changes in calligraphic judgements in these two cases are brought about by two factors – repeated viewing and the accumulation of the experience of calligraphic practice. In my opinion, these two factors, as two key themes that are prevalent in texts on calligraphy, characterise the appreciation of Chinese calligraphy or the process of retrieval, and thus need to be examined further. Underlying these two factors that

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<sup>46</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty texts on calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Qing qianqi shulun* 清前期書論 (Texts on Calligraphy in Early Qing Dynasty). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2003. 316.

influence the judgement of a calligraphic work are two propositions: first, the aesthetic appreciation of works of calligraphy is progressive; second, practising calligraphy enables a viewer to observe certain aesthetic qualities of calligraphic works, and is thus one of the prerequisites for being an ideal calligraphy critic. The following two sections deal with these two issues.

#### 6.4 The calligrapher as critic<sup>48</sup>

I would like to start with the second proposition, one which could be abbreviated as the saying that “a trained calligrapher is an ideal critic”. Replacing the subject “calligrapher” with the higher-order term “artist”, one will find this point may stimulate wider discussions, beyond the boundary of Chinese discourse. Aristotle, for example, presented in his *Politics* the view that practice or the acquisition of skills is essential for art criticism. “They who are to be judges must also be performers,” as he wrote, and “it is difficult, if not impossible, for those who do not perform to be good judges of the performance of others.”<sup>49</sup>

The issue of the relation between art criticism and artistic practice is an ancient and contentious one in texts on Chinese calligraphy. In *Bi zhen tu* 筆陣圖 (Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush), an early text on calligraphy that is attributed to Wei Furen 衛夫人 (272-349), one comes across the following famous saying:

善鑒者不寫，善寫者不鑒。<sup>50</sup>

English translation I: Those who judge well do not copy well, and those who copy well do not judge well.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> This title is, of course, taken from Oscar Wilde’s famous essay “The Artist as Critic”.

<sup>49</sup> Aristotle; Jonathan Barnes, ed. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Vol. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. 2126-2127.

<sup>50</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 22.

<sup>51</sup> Translation cited from Driscoll, Lucy, and Kenji Toda. *Chinese Calligraphy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935. 45.

English translation II: Skilled connoisseurs do not write; skilled calligraphers do not judge.<sup>52</sup>

The above two renditions of Wei's saying, representing typical intuitive ways of translating her sentences, deny what I proposed above, i.e., practising and creating calligraphy make one a better critic of calligraphy. Scholars like Richard Barnhart also found it rather difficult to understand the literal meaning of Wei's words. After providing his translation (the second cited above), Barnhart noted that this is an "enigmatic statement", which is "contradicted by virtually every calligrapher from Wei Fu-jen to the present."<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, these translations are in line with the conventional ways in which this idea has been understood in the centuries succeeding Wei Furen. It has influenced calligraphy critics since the Tang dynasty, and could find echo in not a few texts on this art.<sup>54</sup> For example, at the end of his *Shu yi* 書議 (Views on Calligraphy), the major Tang art critic Zhang Huaiguan wrote:

古之名手，但能其事，不能言其意。今僕雖不能其事，而輒言其意。<sup>55</sup>

Ancient famous masters who are good at practising calligraphy cannot express the *yi* (ideas) within calligraphic works. Though not being skilled in calligraphy, I instead can put across the *yi* within.

Calligraphic practice, for Zhang, is not at all a prerequisite for calligraphic appreciation, and contrary to that, those who are good at calligraphy are normally unable to capture calligraphic ideas. Underlying Zhang's comment might be that

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<sup>52</sup> Translation cited from Barnhart, Richard M. "Wei Fu-Jen' Pi Chen T'u and the Early Texts on Calligraphy." *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 18 (1964): 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>54</sup> For a critical collection of sayings echoing this thought, see Qian, Zhongshu. *Guanzhui bian* 管錐編 (Limited Views). Vol. 3. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986. 1118-1120.

<sup>55</sup> Pan, Yungao, ed. *Zhang Huaiguan shulun* 張懷瓘書論 (Zhang Huaiguan's Essays on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 31.

outsiders – rather than insiders – have more insight into calligraphic works. However, one should not really believe Zhang’s modesty when he said that he did not excel in this art; he was actually listed in the *nengpin* 能品 or “competent class” by the Song dynasty calligraphy historian Zhu Changwen 朱長文 (1039-1098) in the latter’s work *Xu shuduan* 續書斷 (Judgements on Calligraphers Continuation). Also in *Xu shuduan*, Zhu relayed that Zhang had actually believed his cursive calligraphy would be unrivaled in the centuries following his life.<sup>56</sup>

Taking a stand against Zhang Huaiguan’s above view, the late Ming dynasty calligrapher Zhao Yiguang 趙宦光 (1559-1625) contended in a chapter on *pingjian* 評鑒 (Evaluation and Appreciation) of his calligraphic monograph *Hanshan zhoutan* 寒山帚談 (Cherished Views in Cold Mountain):

昔人言“善鑒者不書，善書者不鑒”。一未到，一不屑耳。謂不能鑒者，無是理也；果不能鑒，必不能書。<sup>57</sup>

Ancient scholars said, “Skilled connoisseurs do not write; skilled calligraphers do not judge.” [Actually it’s because] the former falls short of [practical experience], and the latter disdains [being an appreciator]. It doesn’t make sense that [those who can write] are incapable of connoisseurship. If one is unable to appreciate calligraphy, he or she must also be unable to execute this art.

A majority of modern Chinese scholars in the field of calligraphy would agree with Zhao. The much acclaimed twentieth-century calligrapher and painter Bai Jiao 白蕉 (1907-1969), for example, explicitly expressed the view that calligraphic appreciation, itself being conducive to calligraphic practice, necessitates practical skills.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 116.

<sup>57</sup> Zhao, Yiguang. *Hanshan zhoutan* 寒山帚談 (Cherished Views in Cold Mountain). In Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 4. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1992. 102.

<sup>58</sup> Bai, Jiao. “Shufa de xinshang” 書法的欣賞 (Appreciation of Calligraphy). In *Eershí shìjī shufa yanjiu congshu: shenmei yujing pian* 二十世紀書法研究叢書：審美語境篇 (Studies on Calligraphy in the Twentieth

Words of Chinese scholars who affirm or negate the position that a calligrapher makes a better calligraphy critic sound definite and irrebuttable, but none tries to explain why that is, or is not, the case. Such is a feature of pre-modern Chinese calligraphy criticism: critics put forward ideas, and thereafter few bother to explain further. In the above analysis of Xu Wei's calligraphy, I have already noted that there is a correspondence between the calligraphic lines and the calligrapher's bodily movement, which may suggest that calligraphy training per se improves the perception of calligraphy. Inspired by recent research that has been conducted in the field of dance art appreciation, in the following I focus on the concept of "motor perception"<sup>59</sup> to explain why calligraphers are better able to perceive expressive properties. As Barbara Montero understood this concept in the appreciation of dance performances:

[Dance] training is beneficial...because it develops one's "motor perception." Motor perception, as I am using this term, is what enables you, upon watching someone else move, to have a sense of that person's movements via a sense of movement in your body. It enables you, for example, upon watching a dance to not only see the grace, beauty, and power of his movements, but to feel these qualities as well. It also is what is at work when, for example, you feel the urge to straighten your posture when you see someone bent over at the keyboard. It is part of the means by which you come to understand the kinesthetic experience of the person you are observing.<sup>60</sup>

In the fourth chapter, I drew an analogy between the calligraphic linear progression and the dance performance, in that the bodily movements in the performing of both the two arts are continuous and uninterrupted. The difference lies in that, while dance

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Century: A Collection of Essays on Aesthetic Appreciation). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2008. 64.

<sup>59</sup> I borrowed this term from Barbara Montero's two recent articles on the appreciation of dance performance. See Montero, Barbara. "Practice Makes Perfect: The Effect of Dance Training on the Aesthetic Judge." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 11.1 (2012): 59-68; Montero, Barbara. "The Artist as Critic: Dance Training, Neuroscience, and Aesthetic Evaluation." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71.2 (2013): 169-175.

<sup>60</sup> Montero, Barbara. "Practice Makes Perfect: The Effect of Dance Training on the Aesthetic Judge." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 11. 1 (2012): 64.



appreciation, as Montero implied, relies on a perception of the dancer's bodily movement, the appreciation of Chinese calligraphy resorts to physically still lines. Calligraphy, as I discussed in the last chapter, is a spatial art, and to appreciate it one must attend to the structure of the writing and the arrangement of the black ink on a white surface. If we, however, use "brush writing" rather than "calligraphy" to translate Chinese *shufa* (in fact, scholars like Mathias Obert prefer to use the former), we may easily understand the somatic aspect of this art: the calligrapher moves his or her hand – the hand controls the brush – the brush leaves legible lines on the paper. Conventional calligraphic critical theory postulates that successful calligraphic creation necessitates a particular somatic consciousness, and likewise, proper calligraphic appreciation resorts to the kinesthetic experience one accumulates, chiefly, if not only, through calligraphic practice. By virtue of such kinesthetic experience, one is able to capture the gestures that create the still calligraphic forms. And this is what I mean by the "motor perception" in calligraphic appreciation. By comparison, motor perception of calligraphy is more difficult than that of dance performance, as the latter is based largely on the visual perception of the dancer's movements at the present, while calligraphy critics – a majority of them have in hand only the calligraphic work, i.e., the result of a bygone calligraphic performance – need to envisage the artist's gesture.

Some concepts calligraphy theorists have relied on are highly suggestive of the calligrapher's gesture. A core terminology, for example, that describes both the calligrapher's execution and the critic's appreciation is *yong-bi* 用筆, where *yong* means "operation" and *bi* means "brush". For a calligrapher, the significance of *yong bi* lies in that it alerts the calligrapher to the handling of individual lines. It refers to both a particular way of wielding the brush and a particular brushstroke resulting from such a way of *yong-bi*. For Chinese calligraphy critics, to appreciate calligraphic work is to examine the work's *yong-bi* – the quality of the lines, or the artist's way of operating the brush. It is obvious that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between these two aspects of *yong-bi*, but I tend to hold that they are equivalent to each other. The calligraphic concept of *yong-bi* is analogous to "dance step" or "dance pattern": a

dance viewer experiences the dancer's movements. A dance viewer's apprehension of kinesthetic qualities, as the dance critic Edwin Denby suggested, is conducive to his or her grasping of the expressive qualities of the work.<sup>61</sup> In my opinion, calligraphy appreciators who have accumulated experience of *yong-bi*, i.e., wielding the brush themselves, are naturally better able to grasp other people's *yong-bi* (the linear qualities) manifested in their calligraphic works. They have personal experience about which kinds of brush techniques bring which types of calligraphic linear effects, which is essential for the grasping of the inner qualities of calligraphic works. As the Qing dynasty scholar Jiang Chenyin 姜宸英 (1628-1699) said of his appreciative experience of Ming calligrapher Zhu Yunming's 祝允明 (1460-1526) *Thousand Character Classic*:

予手臨一過，頗識其用筆之妙。<sup>62</sup>

After copying this work one time, I can discern considerably the subtlety of his *yong-bi* (use of the brush).

It seems to me that Jiang's note offers a suggestion or an approach for calligraphic appreciation: when an appreciator employs his or her hand – which means copying the work being presented, not merely the eyes, the kinesthetic experience he or she gains in the process of copying will be conducive to the grasping of the calligraphic work's aesthetic qualities, such as the momentum between the lines. I'm not contending that all calligraphers are good calligraphy critics, but that calligraphers who have practical experience, compared to other viewers, are more likely to appreciate multiple layers of the calligraphy, to achieve *zhenshang* (true appreciation).

<sup>61</sup> Denby, Edwin. *Dance Writings and Poetry*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. 34-35.

<sup>62</sup> Jiang, Chenying. *Zhanyuan tiba* 湛園題跋 (Inscriptions and Postscripts from Zhanyuan). In Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 7. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1994. 964.

## 6.5 A progressive experience

Not a few calligraphy critics have mentioned that they *bawan* 把玩 (ponder on, literally meaning “play with”) certain works of calligraphy over and over again. Such repeated “playing with” a calligraphic work may bring – as the above cited Ouyang Xiu’s note on his experience of Li Yong’s calligraphy exemplifies – a change in the critic’s aesthetic judgement of the work being presented. To describe this feature of calligraphic appreciation, I borrow from Harold Osborne the concept “progressive”, for his account of people’s appreciation of the arts in general may have cited Chinese calligraphy as a fine example. As Osborne wrote of his aim for a practical study of appreciation:

It is common experience that our appreciation of any great work of art is progressive. We look at a picture repeatedly. We attend many performances of dramatic or musical compositions...In such repeated contacts with a work of art our experience does not remain uniformly the same...As familiarity increases we come to know the work better, our insight into it is enhanced...In the terminology I have used, the “aesthetic object” which is actualized in our awareness is progressively changed...this change in the aesthetic object is an actual change.<sup>63</sup>

It is implied here that successfully apprehending a work of art in appreciation is not an easy thing. For gifted viewers, an efficacious approach is to apply the mind to the artwork over and over, and such repeated contacts may bring about a change of the visual object on the part of the viewer. Such a process or experience goes through two phases: repeated looking at the physical object and a change in the object of vision. I have touched on these two aspects earlier, and the rest of this section supplements what I presented above by focusing on two concepts in calligraphy criticism – *wan* 玩 and

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<sup>63</sup> Osborne, Harold. *The Art of Appreciation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970. 171.

shenyu 神遇.

A too ordinary term, *wan* has long been neglected by Chinese literary and art theorists. In the second-century *Shuowen* Lexicon, *wan* is explained as *nong* 弄, referring to “play” and “tease”, which is also the basic meaning of this character. However, it is worth pointing out that in the pre-Qin (221 BC) poetry anthology *Chuci* 楚辭 (Verses of *Chu*) and *Yizhuan* 易傳 (Commentaries on the Book of Changes), the concept of *wan* already conveyed the meaning of “appreciation”, “contemplation”, and “to taste or savor repeatedly”.<sup>64</sup> In *Guoyu* 國語 (Discourses of the States), a history record believed to have been compiled in the fifth century BC, *wan* is used as a noun referring to “plaything or objects for appreciation”.<sup>65</sup>

Exploring the etymology of *wan* is conducive to our understanding of this term in Chinese literary and art criticism. Used in calligraphy criticism, the term *wan*, I contend, indicates both a Chinese literati’s attitude and approach to this art: a work of calligraphy could be a plaything, and contemplating calligraphy is a pastime, and a conventional approach to apprehend calligraphy is to “play with” it actively and repetitively. The connotations of *wan* are reminiscent of Kant’s “free play” in his *Critique of Judgement*. For Kant, the aesthetic pleasure one gets from the judging of an object, or the pleasure behind any judgement of beauty, comes from “the free play of imagination and understanding.”<sup>66</sup> It seems to me that the term *wan* in Chinese aesthetics is in a sense analogous to Kant’s “free play”. The appreciation of Chinese calligraphy, and Chinese arts at large, inevitably involves the faculties of imagination and understanding. On one hand, a Chinese viewer’s appreciation is in fact “guided and enhanced by interpretation grounded in knowledge of the history and nature of the medium, genre, and style,

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<sup>64</sup> In the *yuanyou* 遠遊 section of *Chuci*, one can read that “With whom could I enjoy the fragrance that was left to me? Long I stood against the wind, unburdening my heart (誰可與玩斯遺芳兮? 長向風而舒情).” Here, David Hawkes translated *wan* as “enjoy”. Hawkes, David. *The Songs of the South: An Ancient Chinese Anthology of Poems by Qu Yuan and Other Poets*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1985. 195. *Xici zhuan* 繫辭傳 (Great Commentary to the Book of Changes) employs the term *wan* to express a superior man’s contemplation of life’s changing situations. It has that: “the superior man contemplates these images in times of rest and meditates on the judgements. When he undertakes something, he contemplates the changes and ponders on the oracles (君子居則觀其象，而玩其辭；動則觀其變，而玩其占).” Wilhelm, Richard, and Cary F. Baynes. *The I Ching: Or Book of Changes*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1968. 290.

<sup>65</sup> In Chinese: 先王之玩也。

<sup>66</sup> Kant, Immanuel; James Creed Meredith, trans. *Critique of Judgement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 49.

guided, that is, by cognition.”<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, true appreciation, or *zhenshang*, of a calligraphic work, as I discussed earlier, requires that the viewer envisage the creative process of the work or the bodily movement of the artist, that is, through the viewer’s imagination.

Reading classical Chinese texts on the appreciation of calligraphy, one can find that the frequency of *wan* almost equals that of *guan* 觀 (view; observe). Examples are everywhere [emphasis mine]:

好異尚奇之士；玩體勢之多方。（唐・孫過庭）<sup>68</sup>

Sun Guoting (646-691): Gentlemen who love the unusual and esteem what is rare *appreciate* (*wan*) in this art of calligraphy a great variety of shapes and styles.<sup>69</sup>

但貴行坐臥常諦玩，經目著心，久之，自然有悟入處。（宋・陳槱）<sup>70</sup>

Chen You (act. 1190-1219): As long as one frequently views the work attentively, *ruminating on* (*wan*) the work while he is walking, sitting or lying down, he will naturally have an awakening.

在洛中往往有題記，平居好事者并壁匣置座右以為清玩。（宋・趙構）<sup>71</sup>

Zhao Gou (1107-1187): [Yang Ningshi’s] epigraphs are scattered in Luoyang.

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<sup>67</sup> Goldman, Alan H. “The Broad View of Aesthetic Experience.” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71.4 (2013): 328.

<sup>68</sup> Huang, Jian, ed. *Lidai shufa lunwen xuan* 歷代書法論文選 (Selected Treatises on Calligraphy of Successive Dynasties). Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1979. 125.

<sup>69</sup> Translation cited from Chang, Ch’ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, eds. *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. 24.

<sup>70</sup> Chen, You. *Fuxuan yelu* 負暄野錄 (Miscellaneous Notes by the Rustic while Warming Himself under the Sun). In Shui, Caitian, ed. *Songdai shulun* 宋代書論 (Song Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1999. 221.

<sup>71</sup> Zhao, Gou. *Hanmo zhi* 翰墨志 (The Monograph on Brush and Ink). In Lu, Fusheng, ed. *Zhongguo shuhua quanshu* 中國書畫全書 (The Complete Collected Texts on Chinese Calligraphy and Painting). Vol. 2. Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1993. 3.

Those who are fond of this art and have leisure will gather around and sit by the tablets, regarding them as *elegant playthings* (*wan*).

餘家有松雪小楷《大洞玉經》……每移至衡山齋中，即竟日展玩。(明・何良俊)<sup>72</sup>

He Liangjun (1506-1573): My house has held Zhao Songxue's *Dadong yujing* writing in small-character regular script...I often move it to the Hengshan Studio, and then unfold it and *take delight in* (*wan*) it for a whole day.

若開卷未玩意法……此目鑒也。(明・項穆)<sup>73</sup>

Xiang Mu (act. 1599-1620): If one unscrolls a calligraphic work but doesn't *contemplate* (*wan*) its ideas and techniques...such an approach is called judging by the eyes.

The above examples embody the popular usages of *wan* in pre-modern calligraphy criticism. A piece of calligraphy, for Song Emperor Zhao Gou and for those who love this art, is an elegant plaything (*qingwan*). The objects of calligraphic appreciation (*wan*) are the shapes and styles (*tishi* 體勢) in the sense used by Sun Guoting, and the ideas and techniques (*yi fa* 意法) as described by Xiang Mu. I have explicated this aspect in the section on the aesthetic object. Citing these examples of *wan*, what I want to emphasise here is a playful approach through which Chinese art critics come to apprehend calligraphic works. It reveals the playful mood with which Chinese connoisseurs contemplate or appreciate (*wan*) calligraphic works, and paintings and poems as well. It is not that a Chinese viewer, in order to apprehend a calligraphic work,

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<sup>72</sup> He, Liangjun. *Siyou zhai shulun* 四友齋書論 (Comments on Calligraphy from Siyou Studio). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Mingdai shulun* 明代書論 (Ming Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002. 110.

<sup>73</sup> Xiang, Mu. *Shufa ya yan* 書法雅言 (A Faithful Narrative of Calligraphy). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Mingdai shulun* 明代書論 (Ming Dynasty Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 2002. 257.

agonises over it. Instead, he or she hangs the work on the wall, and casts a glance at it every now and then while walking past it or sitting on a chair. And as Chen You said, constant contact with the work will naturally bring about comprehension in varying degrees.

The fact that scholars like He Liangjun would *zhanwan* 展玩 (literally meaning “unfold and appreciate”) a single work from Zhao Songxue for a whole day implies two things: one, every time unfolding the work he may have different visual experience and enjoyment; two, the work might contain recondite aesthetic qualities which attract him to unscroll it again and again. In repeated *bawan* or appreciation of a calligraphic work, the “changes come about in the visual object without corresponding changes in the physical thing to which attention is directed.”<sup>74</sup> In the same piece of calligraphy a Chinese critic might see different things during the process of repeated commerce with it, and his or her understanding of the work might be gradually enriched. To repeatedly *bawan* works of calligraphy is both means and ends for Chinese literati critics – it brings enjoyment and it leads to a work’s being apprehended more fully in appreciation.

Another point in Osborne’s description of the progressive apprehension of art is that the aesthetic object that is actualised in the viewer’s awareness would change. Such a change might be sudden or gradual, as Osborne observed:

the ‘dramatic changes’ ...take place when we ‘suddenly’ see the aesthetic object as a unified system of interrelated shapes and patterns instead of a chaotic welter of meaningless impressions. This is an experience with which all connoisseurs are familiar. But the change may, of course, be gradual rather than sudden.<sup>75</sup>

For Osborne, the emergence of the aesthetic object is accompanied by the viewer’s experience of a unification of the work’s formal features. It is hard to find from pre-modern Chinese texts on calligraphy descriptions of the characteristics of the changed

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<sup>74</sup> Osborne, Harold. *The Art of Appreciation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1970. 173.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

visual experience. Instead, many Daoist terminologies, later being used as aesthetic categories, account for the viewer's psychological realms where the change occurs in aesthetic seeing. Among them are a pair of synonyms – *shenyu* 神遇 (spiritual encountering) and *shenhui* 神會 (intuitive apprehension).

In Daoist epistemology, a piece of calligraphy or a painting and its aesthetic object, much as the myriad things of the world, embody Dao. The Tang scholar Fu Zai 符載 (act. 780-822) even said, “When we contemplate Master Chang’s art, it is not painting, it is the very Dao itself.”<sup>76</sup> And to experience Dao, as Zhuangzi prescribed through the words of Cook Ding, one must “deal with the object through spiritual encountering (*shenyu*) and do not look at it with eyes”.<sup>77</sup> In the transcendental realm of Dao, as the contemporary scholar Man Kit Wah wrote:

a thing is not an object but an “ideal state,” a form in itself, appreciation of which is capable only with the Daoist wisdom, i.e., the “intellectual intuition”...in which the sense of beauty and aesthetic pleasure...spring up...<sup>78</sup>

To a Western aesthetic mind, this might sound mystical. But if we juxtapose *shenyu* with a few terms I have discussed in this chapter, such as *jingshen* (spirit), *xinjian* (viewing by the mind), and *wan* (contemplate; play), it is not hard to sense that a Chinese theory of calligraphic appreciation, and artistic appreciation at large, emphasises an abolition of the subject-object relation, or by the Western aesthetic term – an empathetic process. Osborne didn’t explain adequately how the change in aesthetic seeing occurs, while within the context of a Chinese aesthetic discourse, it might be caused by spiritual encountering or communion (*shenyu*, *shenhui*). As Susan Bush understood this process or experience:

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<sup>76</sup> Chinese text: 觀夫張公之藝，非畫也，真道也。 Translation cited from Bush, Susan, and Hsio-Yen Shih, comps. and eds. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 85.

<sup>77</sup> Chinese text: 以神遇而不以目視。 Chen, Guying, comm. and trans. *Zhuangzi jin zhu jin yi* 莊子今注今譯 (Zhuangzi Annotated and Translated in Modern Chinese). Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007. 116.

<sup>78</sup> Man, Eva Kit Wah. *Issues of Contemporary Art and Aesthetics in Chinese Context*. Berlin: Springer, 2015. 19.



One could enter a state of absolute concentration in which an object was grasped through total identification (*ju-shen*) and then arrive at a fusion of the subject and the object – the artist, or viewer, and the work of art (*shen-hui*). This was not, however, conceived to be a forced process.<sup>79</sup>

By reference to Bush, we can try to understand the following expression on the intuitive apprehension (*shenhui*) of Chinese calligraphy:

故知書道玄妙，必資神遇，不可以力求也。（唐•虞世南）<sup>80</sup>

Yu Shinan (558-638): Thus we know that the Dao of calligraphy is enigmatic; a grasp of which is contingent on spiritual encountering (*shenyu*) and cannot be got by effort.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined major aspects of Chinese calligraphic appreciation, focusing on the aesthetic object of calligraphic works and the process of appreciation. I have argued that the aesthetic objects in the experience of a calligraphic work are twofold: the outer form and the inner qualities. This is analogous to what Carroll understood as the object of aesthetic experience, i.e. the formal and/or expressive properties. In the discussion of appreciating a particular work of calligraphy, I used Wollheim's term "retrieval". To view calligraphic criticism or appreciation as retrieval is, in a sense, to take the creative process as the critical object. I argue that a trained calligrapher is an ideal critic, because proper calligraphic appreciation resorts to the kinesthetic experience one accumulates, chiefly, if not only, through calligraphic practice. In the last section, I examined the

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<sup>79</sup> Bush, Susan, and Hsio-Yen Shih, comps. and eds. *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985. 16.

<sup>80</sup> Yu, Shinan. *Bi sui lun* 筆髓論 (On the Essence of the Brushwork). In Pan, Yungao, ed. *Chutang shulun* 初唐書論 (Early Tang Texts on Calligraphy). Changsha: Hunan meishu chubanshe, 1997. 34.

concept of *wan*. I contend that repeated “playing with” a calligraphic work may bring a change in the critic’s aesthetic judgement of a piece of calligraphy.

## Conclusion

In early April of 2015 I returned to the village where I was born and raised, just an ordinary village in central China where my grandmother still lives. After lunch, on a sudden whim, I went to find the schoolhouse I attended some twenty years ago. My schooling, culminating in this dissertation, began in that small tile-roofed building. Although I left it when I was eight – to be educated in the town where my parents still live, followed by middle school in the county, leaving the province for college, and ultimately pursuing knowledge in a foreign country – it was in that schoolhouse that I learnt to read, count and experience the first glimmerings of aesthetic awareness.

How time and age shrink childhood! The road to the school, which once seemed very long, especially on days raining and blowing, was now a brief stroll. Retracing those country lanes many years later, however, set me at ease. That easy feeling lasted as long as it took me to discover the school was gone, replaced by impressive three-storey houses. A resident told me it had been demolished several years ago. “Demolished” – a ubiquitous word for a ubiquitous act in today’s China! Loss of past the recurring footnote to China’s urbanisation and economic prosperity during the preceding twenty years. I should have expected this! In the town my parents live in, wasn’t it the case that many houses, streets, and dams had been, or were going to be, demolished? This recognition saddened me. It is as if one’s sense of nostalgia is deprived of sustenance.

On the way back to my village, I noticed many villagers were ploughing their fields to prepare for rice transplanting. At least the paddy fields, which would in the autumn again turn to gold, still remained. It suddenly occurred to me that this was still the homeland of my memory, and that my China is not altogether an urbanised China. Rooted in this land is an agricultural civilisation, a Confucian ethos, an artistic tradition, and many other aspects of a millennia-long Chinese culture. These aspects maintain an intimate relationship with one another, and will not be readily demolished or changed.

Western visitors who spend a few days in Beijing or Shanghai probably take what

they see there – the skyscrapers, the resilient public transportation, and all the current fashions – to represent the new Chineseness, perhaps a declaration that modern China is not far removed from many Western countries. Indeed, many Chinese also imagine their country in a similar way, disregarding its past, not noticing the traditional humanistic values that still guide a Chinese way of life for so many of its people.

To keep the all-important present on the track, as F. W. Mote acutely put it, “the Chinese past had to become greater than the Chinese present in order for the accumulated wisdom of human civilization to impose its guiding function.”<sup>1</sup> If we regard modern China as a unity that consists of various spheres, a proper understanding of, or the further refinements to, its cultural sphere naturally requires one to recover the past of specific cultural forms. For me, in order to understand Chinese *shufa* and the Chinese artistic tradition at large, it seems an inevitable choice, perhaps an inevitable duty, to read the old texts, to study the “old words” that remain vital in contemporary discourses on Chinese art.

While the primary purpose of this thesis is to present a theory, an aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy, which encompasses the crucial aesthetic dimensions of this art as they are revealed in traditional Chinese calligraphic theory, the various dimensions can be tied together by a same basic idea: calligraphy is an embodiment of a Chinese cultural world.

I believe that when a contemporary Chinese picks up a brush and copies a model calligraphy from the past, the traces on the paper combine with his or her physical movements and harmony of eye and brain, to produce an embodied phenomenon. It is not just that the progressive lines of calligraphic work can be regarded as the imprint of the artist’s bodily movement, but that the calligrapher’s slightest twisting of the brush, the quality of a single line, are all in resonance with, or embody, long-established Chinese aesthetic norms. Moreover, the fact that Chinese calligraphic lines are embodied lines makes it possible, and also requisite, that viewers of this art reproduce

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<sup>1</sup> F. W. Mote. “The Arts and the ‘Theorizing Mode’ of the Civilization”. In Murck, Christian F., ed. *Artists and Traditions: Uses of the Past in Chinese Culture*. Princeton: The Art Museum, Princeton University, 1976. 6.

mentally the creative process of the work. A Chinese aesthetic tradition is thus, at its most practical level, embodied in a calligraphy student's execution of a forceful stroke, in a common viewer's retracing of a piece of calligraphy hanging on a museum wall.

Calligraphic practice and evaluation in China embody a social norm, specifically, the Confucian norm. In imperial China, renowned calligraphers were often the educated elite, or the Confucian scholar-officials who conformed to Confucian mores. In the Confucian tradition, calligraphic practice, along with all the other arts, is regarded as a means of seeking moral perfection or self-cultivation (*xiushen* 修身). Besides that, calligraphic evaluation embodies another important dimension of a Confucian way of life – the idea of *de* 德 (virtue). In classical Confucian thought, the moral value, the moral perfection on the part of the cultured elite artist is an end, while the practice of art, as “disciplines of the body (*ti* 體) and mind/heart (*xin* 心), which engages the gentleman-scholar in the cultivation of the self (*xiushen*)”,<sup>2</sup> provides a Confucian artist a means to that end. This helps explain why a moralistic approach – one which is preoccupied with the ethical value of the calligrapher rather than his or her calligraphy – prevails in calligraphy criticism.

The three sections of this thesis have focused respectively on calligraphic works and form (*xing* 形), the past (*gu* 古) and present (*jin* 今), the mind (*xin*) and the hand (*shou* 手) in calligraphic practice, and calligraphic evaluation and appreciation (*shang* 賞). The inception of each chapter starts with a few key calligraphic terms, and my understanding of these terms is based on the full scope of pre-modern Chinese literature in the field. That is to say, traditional calligraphic theories established a cognitive foundation for this study. On the other hand, I am well aware that ideas from other aesthetic discourses might be transferrable to offer explanations for certain aspects of Chinese calligraphic art. In this latter sense, a Western aesthetic mind might find this study has successively explored the definitions of art, artistic form, creative practice, “ethico-aesthetics”, somaesthetics, and evaluating and judgement. Western aesthetic

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<sup>2</sup> Goldberg, Stephen. “Chinese Aesthetics.” In Deutsch, Eliot, and Ron Bontekoe, eds. *A Companion to World Philosophies*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997. 226.

theories, as I said earlier, enlighten my understanding of Chinese calligraphic terms.

Not all issues relating to Chinese calligraphic criticism suggest an analogy in Western aesthetic discourses, of course, and the guiding principle underlying this thesis is still to respect a unique Chinese calligraphic discourse or aesthetic tradition. This is recognised by the fact that titles of all the chapters are common idiomatic expressions in Chinese calligraphy criticism. In the following, I want to reiterate the key themes of the thesis by briefly examining the chapter titles.

The first chapter is titled *chidu bi zhen* 尺牘必珍, meaning “casual letters from famous calligraphers are sure to be treasured”. In classical Chinese, *chidu* refers to epistle or letter. Since Western Jin (265-317), calligraphy commentaries and historical texts frequently described officials as “good at epistles”, or *shan chidu* 善尺牘 in Chinese. “Good at epistles” should not be understood solely as “good at writing letters”; this term was meant to highlight a person’s full calligraphic talents. From the fourth to the sixth century, especially in southern China, those “good at epistles” were conscious of the role letters could play in demonstrating their calligraphy. During that same period, casual letters from famous calligraphers, such as Wang Xizhi and Wang Xianzhi, were collected and appreciated. *Chidu*, as a genre of utilitarian writing, had transformed into artistic calligraphy works. And it is generally believed that it is the calligraphic fascination of these letters, rather than their literary content, that makes those *chidu* artworks. Also discussed in this first chapter are two other calligraphic genres – stone inscriptions and sutra transcriptions – which had undergone a similar transformation.

The second chapter focused on two key aesthetic terms in Chinese calligraphic theories – *xing* (形) and *shi* (勢), and the title of this chapter – *xingshi xiangyin* 形勢相映 (calligraphic *xing* and *shi* are mutually reflected) – aptly summarised the relation between these two terms. On one hand, the calligraphic *shi*, which can be understood as directional force or an aesthetic effect, is bound to the visible and static *xing* (form). On the other hand, if the form of a calligraphic work does not achieve such aesthetic effect or dynamic configuration (*shi*), such form is not a “form of motion” or a “living form”, as Susanne Langer termed it – something successful calligraphic works present.

Later in this chapter, I further explicated how *shi* persists through the three aspects of calligraphic form, i.e. brushstrokes, characters and the compositional arrangement.

The Chinese idiom *yu gu wei tu* 與古為徒 (being a disciple of the past) is used as the title of the third chapter, expressing a general aesthetic preference for antiquities in China. Its usage goes beyond calligraphy theory to describe a reverence towards the past in the diverse fields of painting, literature, collecting, and social norms. However, among the three arts (of literature, painting and calligraphy), it is in the field of calligraphy that most attention is given to artistic continuity and tradition. Every Chinese calligrapher starts with learning from the past before embarking on his or her own creation. Learning from the past in calligraphic practice, however, doesn't deny the fact that creativity or originality is a value embedded in Chinese aesthetics. Since the Tang dynasty, calligraphers as well as critics have used a variety of terms and phrases to frame the concept of originality, such as *shu nu* 書奴 (slave writer), *xin yi* 新意 (new ideas), and *bian tai* 變態 (change or transformation).

By using *xin shou shuang chang* 心手雙暢 (mind and hand acting in harmony) as the title of the fourth chapter, I want to indicate that calligraphic creation should be understood as a psychosomatic process. I used four key concepts, *guan* 觀 (to view), *qing* 情 (emotion), *xing* 性 (nature; disposition) and *yi* 意 (intention; idea), to disentangle the various aspects of the mind of a creative calligrapher, arguing that these aspects of the calligrapher's mind mix together and constitute the aesthetic idea, which will then be realised by virtue of the calligrapher's bodily movement.

The title for the fifth chapter, *shu ru qiren* 書如其人 (calligraphy mirrors the calligrapher), is a well-known expression to Chinese people. It points to the fact that, in Chinese calligraphic criticism, there is a strong tendency to evaluate the aesthetic qualities of calligraphy in direct reference to the artist's moral rectitude. The second part of this chapter discussed the Chinese theory *pin* 品 (classification), suggesting that the system of *pin* constitutes a unique value matrix in Chinese art discourse, by means of which Chinese scholars, connoisseurs, and art critics assess and rank the cultural, economic, and aesthetic values of different types of paintings and calligraphic

works, if not all different artworks.

*Ming ru qin du* 明如親睹 (calligraphic appreciation is like one witnessed the creation) is a term I adopted from an insightful paragraph of Xiang Mu's 項穆 (fl. 1590) *Shufa ya yan* 書法雅言 (A Faithful Narrative of Calligraphy). This idiom echoes my argument that calligraphic appreciation can be understood as a process of *retrieval*, a term I took from Richard Wollheim. To view calligraphic criticism or appreciation as *retrieval* is, in a sense, to take the creative process as the critical object. This chapter also explores a recurring topic in calligraphy criticism – whether a trained calligrapher is an ideal critic, arguing that calligraphy appreciators who have accumulated experience of *yong-bi* 用筆, i.e., wielding the brush themselves, are naturally better able to grasp other people's *yong-bi* (linear qualities) manifested in their calligraphic works. Proper calligraphic appreciation, I contend, resorts to the kinesthetic experience one accumulates, chiefly, if not only, through calligraphic practice.

Western viewers engaging with Chinese aesthetics and artworks have found the art of Chinese calligraphy difficult to understand. The principal objective of this thesis is that principles generated in the discussions of calligraphic form, creative practice, and calligraphic appreciation can help Western readers appreciate the aesthetic dimensions of calligraphic art. In a very recent article, Kathleen M Higgins, the current president of the American Society for Aesthetics, argued that

the default interpretation of 'aesthetics' should be global aesthetics, and that aestheticians should take as standard preparation for work in the field some basic knowledge of aesthetics in various cultural traditions.<sup>3</sup>

"Global aesthetics" assumes a frame of reference. This thesis gives the novice an overview of how an aesthetics of China's prime visual art developed and what kinds of

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<sup>3</sup> Higgins, Kathleen M. "Global Aesthetics –What Can We Do." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 75.4 (2017): 339.



issues have traditionally concern Chinese aesthetic minds. Western aestheticians might find the issues discussed here, such as psychosomatic “calligraphic bodily movement” and Xiang Mu’s *ming ru qin du* (like one witnessed the creation), as transferable to other aesthetic fields.

Educators of Chinese calligraphy will find certain ideas presented here to be quite practical. Discussion on the mutual reflection of calligraphic *xing* and *shi* offers an explanation of the motions underpinning the subtle force of each mark of the calligrapher’s work. An understanding of this inter-dependence would help the practitioners go beyond the copying of static calligraphic forms, and attend to the directionality of a complete movement, to the aesthetic affects (force) of calligraphic form. Discussions on critical retrieval in the last chapter provides a pragmatic approach to the teaching of calligraphic appreciation and *dutie* 讀帖 (studying and contemplating masterworks).<sup>4</sup>

Calligraphy is not a representational art; it is an art of characters, and as such may be considered as difficult for non-Chinese readers to appreciate. However, it is generally believed that calligraphers get inspiration from natural objects and then create calligraphic forms that embody the movement, rhythm, and the spirit of the myriad things. Calligraphy, as well as the other artistic activities in China, Francois Jullien wrote, “was seen as a process of actualization, which produced a particular configuration of the dynamism inherent in reality.” This is reminiscent of the words of the Qing art critic Liu Xizai 劉熙載 (1813-1881):

藝者，道之形也。<sup>5</sup>

Art is the embodiment of the Dao.

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<sup>4</sup> I thank Dr David Bell, an examiner of this thesis, for his insightful questions, and for several points raised here in the Conclusion.

<sup>5</sup> Liu, Xizai; Wang Qizhong, comm. *Yi gai jianzhu* 藝概箋注 (Annotations of Essentials of the Arts). Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1986. 496.

## Appendix:

### Zhang Yinlin: A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism (1931)

Translation and introduction by Xiongbo Shi

[The following appeared in the 13<sup>th</sup> volume of the *Journal of Art Historiography*, and is formatted as it was published.]<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction: aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy in early 20<sup>th</sup> century

To readers of the present journal and to researchers of Chinese aesthetics, Zhang Yinlin 張蔭麟 (1905-1942) is not a familiar figure. After all, he is best known as an historian, and he produced few works on Chinese art.<sup>2</sup> However, in 1931, Zhang – then a philosophy student at Stanford University – wrote a 13,000-character treatise laying out the basis for the discipline of calligraphy criticism. Although he entitled this treatise ‘A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism’ 中國書藝批評學序言 (‘Preface’ hereafter), much of the text concerns wider issues in aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy. Before introducing Zhang’s ‘Preface’, it is necessary to contextualise this work by briefly reviewing writing on Chinese calligraphy aesthetics during the first decades of the twentieth century.

Following the introduction of Western aesthetics at the turn of the century, theoretical writing on art had undergone a paradigm shift in Chinese academia. As far as Chinese calligraphy was concerned, the publishing of Kang Youwei’s 康有為 (1858-1927) *Guang yizhou shuangji* 廣藝舟雙楫 (Expanding on Two Oars of the

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<sup>1</sup> Shi, Xiongbo. “Zhang Yinlin: A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism (1931).” *Journal of Art Historiography* 13 (2015): 13-XS1. I’m grateful to Dr Richard Bullen and Professor Peter Sturman for reading the article and for their comments and criticism. I also wish to thank Kara Kennedy for her help proofreading the introduction.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of Zhang Yinlin’s writings, see Chen Rucheng, Li Xinrong, eds., *Zhang Yinlin quanji* 張蔭麟全集 (A Complete Collection of Zhang Yinlin), Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2013.

Ship of Art) in 1891 marked the end of traditional calligraphy criticism<sup>3</sup>, and Wang Guowei's 王國維 (1877-1927) treatise 'On the Position of the Refined in Aesthetics' in 1907, to many contemporary calligraphy theorists, initiated modern calligraphy aesthetics, or modern Chinese aesthetics at large. Wang's article bore the stamp of Western formalist theory, that all beauty is in essence formal beauty that lies in the symmetry, variety, and harmony of form.<sup>4</sup> His treatise, however, dedicated only a small paragraph to calligraphy, in which he labelled it an 'inferior art' (*dideng zhi meishu* 低等之美術).

The 1920s was the first golden period of modern Chinese aesthetics. In 1920, Liu Renhang 劉仁航 (1884-1938) translated the first foreign book on aesthetics, *Jinshi Meixue* 近世美學, or *Modern Aesthetics*, originally written in Japanese by Takayama Chogyū (1871-1902).<sup>5</sup> Following that, more than a dozen books on aesthetics were published during the 1920s, being either translated works or original works by Chinese scholars.<sup>6</sup> Concerns discussed by Chinese aestheticians were often the same as those covered in Western aesthetics at the same time, such as aesthetic feelings, form and content, and aesthetic judgement. These new conceptions or categories were destined to reform calligraphy criticism in China. An early example was Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 (1873-1929) speech 'A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy' (*Shufa zhidao* 書法指導), delivered at Tsinghua University in 1926.<sup>7</sup> Liang's talk was

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of Kang's text, see Chen Fangji and Lei Zhixiong, *Shufa meixue sixiangshi* 書法美學思想史 (A History of Calligraphy Aesthetics), Zhengzhou: Henan meishu chubanshe, 1994, 643-655.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Wang Guowei's theory of 'the Refined' (*guya shuo* 古雅說), see Wang Keping, 'Wang Guowei: Philosophy of Aesthetic Criticism', in Chung-Ying Cheng and Nicholas Bunnin, eds., *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002, 37-56.

<sup>5</sup> Takayama Chogyū, *Kinsei Bigaku* 近世美学, Tokyo: Hakubunkan, 1899.

<sup>6</sup> In 1921, Geng Jizhi 耿濟之 translated Leo Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* Xiao Shijun 肖石君 translated Henry Marshall's *Aesthetic Principles* in 1922. Heavily influenced by German Aesthetics, Lv Cheng 呂澂, from 1923 to 1926, published four books on aesthetics: *Meixue qianshuo* 美學淺說 (An Elementary Introduction to Aesthetics), *Meixue gailun* 美學概論 (An Introduction to Aesthetics), *Wanjin meixue sicao* 晚近美學思潮 (Modern Aesthetic Thoughts), and *Wanjin meixueshuo he meide yuanli* 晚近美學說和美的原理 (Modern Aesthetic Thoughts and Aesthetic Principles). In 1923, Xu Dachun 徐大純 published *Mei yu rensheng* 美與人生 (Beauty and Life). In 1924, Huang Chanhua 黃懋華 wrote probably the first history of Western Aesthetics in Chinese – *Meixue lueshi* 美學略史 (A Brief History of Aesthetics). Liu Sixun 劉思訓, in 1927, translated John Ruskin's *Lectures on Art*, and in the same year, Chen Wangdao 陳望道 and Fan Shoukang 范壽康 published two books with the same title *Meixue gailun* 美學概論 (An Introduction to Aesthetics). Xu Qingyu 徐慶譽 published *Meide zhexue* 美的哲學 (Philosophy of Beauty) in 1928.

<sup>7</sup> Liang Qichao's speech was included in Zheng Yizeng, ed., *Minguo shulun jingxuan* 民國書論精選 (A Select Collection of Calligraphy Criticism in Republican China), Hangzhou: Xiling yinshe chubanshe, 2013, 15-29.

much influenced by Western aesthetic ideas, such as Kant's view that judgements of beauty are disinterested. Liang proposed that the beauty of Chinese calligraphy lies in four aspects: beauty of lines, beauty of light<sup>8</sup>, beauty of power, and expression of personality. Published as an article late in 1926, Liang's paper exerted a considerable influence within China's academia at the time, which can be partly confirmed by Zhang Yinlin's frequent reference to it in his 'Preface'.

The study of the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy began to thrive in the 1930s. Many scholars, most of whom had studied in Western countries, started to pay attention to the field. Zhang Yinlin's 'Preface', serialised in the Literary Supplement of *Da Gong Bao*, was most probably the first paper on calligraphy aesthetics published in the 1930s. Deng Yizhe 鄧以蜚 (1892-1973), who had studied literature and aesthetics at Waseda University (1907-1911) and Columbia University (1917-1922), wrote his first article on calligraphy aesthetics in 1937. Entitled 'Appreciation of Calligraphy' (*Shufa zhi xinshang* 書法之欣賞), Deng's article divided all art into two types: decorative art and pure art, the latter's purity arising from the free expression of the artist. For Deng, Chinese calligraphy was a pure art. In contrast to Zhang's overt Occidental perspective, Deng's article integrated Western aesthetic concepts implicitly. In discussing calligraphic brushstrokes, for example, Deng wrote:

Brushstrokes in calligraphy are not the traces of individual lines, but the overflowing beauty out of the brush and ink controlled by the calligrapher's finger, wrist, and mind; this is so-called expression.<sup>9</sup>

Also in the 1930s, writing on calligraphy by two other Chinese scholars who mainly wrote in English, Lin Yutang 林語堂 (1895-1976) and Chiang Yee 蔣彝 (1903-1977), influenced the West's understanding of calligraphy at a deeper level. Lin Yutang's calligraphy criticism was faithfully recorded in his first English book, *My*

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<sup>8</sup> According to Liang's speech, the light of calligraphic works refers to the variations of ink tones.

<sup>9</sup> Deng Yizhe, 'Shufa zhi xinshang' (書法之欣賞), in *Guowen Zhoubao*, Vol. 14, No. 24, 1937, 29.

*Country and My People*. In this 1935 US bestseller, Lin devoted a section to Chinese art – Chinese calligraphy, painting, and architecture. Crediting calligraphy with the central position in the Chinese artistic tradition, Lin Yutang stated:

So fundamental is the place of calligraphy in Chinese art *as a study of form and rhythm in the abstract* that we may say it has provided the Chinese people with a basic esthetics, and it is through calligraphy that the Chinese have learnt their basic notions of line and form.<sup>10</sup>

To explain rhythm and form, Lin Yutang proposed an ‘animistic principle’. According to this principle, Chinese calligraphers, in exploring rhythms and forms, have derived ‘artistic inspiration from nature, especially from plants and animals.’<sup>11</sup> It is commonplace for traditional calligraphy criticism to compare calligraphic forms with images drawn from nature, and Lin Yutang’s ‘animistic principle’ inherited this tradition in some ways.<sup>12</sup>

In 1938, Chiang Yee – then a Chinese teacher at the School of Oriental Studies (now School of Oriental and African Studies), University of London – published his book *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to Its Aesthetic and Technique*, the first detailed English monograph on Chinese calligraphy. Chiang Yee noticed the fundamental role of calligraphy to Chinese arts, and also observed the relationship between dynamic calligraphic form and natural imagery. A novelty of Chiang’s aesthetics lies in his connecting the aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy with the aesthetics of modern abstract art, in his contention that the ‘significant forms’ in calligraphy are a representation of reality as well as a simulation of the lively forms in nature. Art critic Herbert Read, in his 1954 preface to the second edition of Chiang’s book, affirmed this

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<sup>10</sup> Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935, 291.

<sup>11</sup> Lin Yutang, *My Country and My People*, New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1935, 293.

<sup>12</sup> A lot of calligraphy commentaries use natural imagery, such as Wei Furen’s *Bi zhen tu* 筆陣圖 (Diagram of the Battle Formation of the Brush) and Sun Guoting’s *shupu* 書譜 (A Treatise on Chinese Calligraphy). For English translations of the two texts, see Richard M. Barnhart, ‘Wei Fu-jen’s Pi Chen T’u and the Early Texts on Chinese Calligraphy’, *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America*, Vol. 18, 1964, 13-25; Chang Ch’ung-ho, and Hans H. Frankel, trans., *Two Chinese Treatises on Calligraphy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

comparison in proclaiming that ‘a new movement of painting has grown up which is at least in part directly inspired by Chinese calligraphy.’<sup>13</sup> For Read, the aesthetic principles of Chinese calligraphy are the ‘aesthetic principles of all genuine art.’<sup>14</sup>

The works listed above, in varying degrees, adopt the Western aesthetic categories, such as ‘form’, ‘expression’ and ‘inspiration’. They pioneered and represented the paradigm shift in twentieth-century calligraphy criticism, a shift from the traditional discourse to one that engages in a dialogue between Chinese calligraphy criticism and Western aesthetic theories. And with regard to a comparative perspective, Zhang Yinlin went even further. In his ‘Preface’, Zhang focused on three key issues – aesthetic experience, classification of art, and the formal elements of Chinese calligraphy. He began by considering whether calligraphy is an art. Unlike other contemporary calligraphy critics, who regarded the answer as self-evident, Zhang arrived at his answer from the perspective of aesthetic inquiry. His starting point was the experience of beauty. ‘In order to discuss the peculiarities of Chinese calligraphy,’ as he wrote, ‘we need to elucidate the concept of aesthetic experience.’ It is not a coincidence that Zhang Yinlin started his calligraphy criticism with aesthetic experience, given that it had been a major focus in Britain and American aesthetics in the first few decades of the twentieth century,<sup>15</sup> and that Zhang was studying philosophy at Stanford while writing the ‘Preface’. To be precise, Zhang’s approach to aesthetic experience is a mixture of the theories of British aesthetician Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923) and the American philosopher DeWitt Parker (1885-1949). His contention that aesthetic experience, in its narrow sense, refers to ‘beauty’ had its source in Parker’s *The Principles of Aesthetics*.<sup>16</sup> In order to explicate ‘beauty’, and to define art, Zhang Yinlin introduced the term *juexiang* 覺相 (literally meaning ‘perceptual form’),<sup>17</sup> most probably chosen as a Chinese equivalent to Parker’s ‘sensuous

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<sup>13</sup> Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973, ix.

<sup>14</sup> Chiang Yee, *Chinese Calligraphy: An Introduction to its Aesthetic and Technique*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973, viii.

<sup>15</sup> For a detailed discussion of American aesthetics in the early twentieth century, see Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 235-308.

<sup>16</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 53.

<sup>17</sup> The word *juexiang* 覺相 was a Buddhist term where *jue* means ‘perception’ and *xiang* means ‘appearance or

medium'.<sup>18</sup> Parker employed this term to ameliorate Croce's definition that 'art is expression' when he described expression, 'for our own ends, as the putting forth of purpose, feeling, or thought into a sensuous medium, where they can be experienced again by the one who expresses himself and communicated to others.'<sup>19</sup> For Parker, not every expression is a work of art, and the sensuous embodiment of what is expressed is essential to artistic expression and the definition of art.<sup>20</sup> Influenced by Parker's definition of art, Zhang put emphasis on *juexiang* (perceptual form), within which he identified three features. First, some perceptual forms can evoke relevant feelings, some cannot. Second, some perceptual forms, such as gustatory and olfactory forms, are pure and simple and have no variations in structure; some visual and auditory forms are complex and diversified, and thus they can generate diverse levels of feelings. Third, perceptual forms engender two kinds of feelings, namely 'positive feeling' and 'negative feeling', and if a perceptual form can arouse 'positive feeling' and is manmade, it may be described as 'beautiful' or an 'artwork'. These three features owe their clarity to Bosanquet, who, at the beginning of his *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, introduced three characteristics of pleasant feelings in aesthetic objects – stability, relevance, and community.<sup>21</sup> All of these discussions are aimed at revealing the nature of Chinese calligraphy, and for Zhang, works of Chinese calligraphy, as perceptual forms, evoke emotions, have complex structural variations, and engender positive feelings, and therefore are artworks.

In the second section of the 'Preface', Zhang enumerated five classifications of art and defined calligraphy through its relation with other arts. First, because of the sensory organs employed, Chinese calligraphy is a visual art. Second, in terms of the states and properties of the objects, Chinese calligraphy is a spatial art.<sup>22</sup> Third, in

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posture or form'.

<sup>18</sup> The translator chooses 'perceptual form' rather than Parker's 'sensuous medium' every time that Zhang mentioned the term *juexiang* in his 'Preface'.

<sup>19</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 16.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics. Volume 3: The Twentieth Century*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 266-267.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1915, 3-6.

<sup>22</sup> Zhang classified arts as spatial art and temporal art based on the state of movement or stillness of aesthetic objects. Some calligraphy theorists today would argue that calligraphy is both a spatial art and a temporal art, since it not only achieves freedom from time, but also within time.

terms of the means or tools used in its practice, Chinese calligraphy is a graphic art. The fourth classification was based on Bosanquet's differentiation between *a priori* (or directly expressive) form and representative form. By *a priori* forms, Bosanquet means that their 'expressiveness must be in some degree inherent in the form,' and 'they are...direct resemblance of emotions, that is, without making the circuit of reference to anything which had a name and existence in the external world.'<sup>23</sup> The expressiveness of representative forms, however, has to rely on meaning that can only be acquired with the aid of knowledge and past experience. Observing that the beauty of Chinese calligraphy lies in the forms of the symbols of Chinese characters and is irrelevant to their meanings, Zhang considered Chinese calligraphy to be a directly expressive art. From the end of the 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, a period of intense activity for modern Chinese aesthetics, a group of Chinese aestheticians labelled Chinese calligraphy as a 'linear art',<sup>24</sup> and asserted that its beauty lies in its 'Significant Form', a term they borrowed from the English art critic Clive Bell.<sup>25</sup> Zhang's identifying Chinese calligraphy as *a priori* form, to some degree, then was an antecedent of late twentieth-century calligraphy aesthetics. The last classification divided art into pure art and utilitarian art, and for Zhang, Chinese calligraphy is, as we would expect, a utilitarian art.

The third section of Zhang's 'Preface' dealt with the formal elements of calligraphic works: colours, individual lines and structures of brushstrokes. In this section, Zhang drew inspiration from the work of early twentieth century American aestheticians, such as DeWitt Parker, Ethel Puffer, and George Santayana, and he directly translated or paraphrased sections of their work. In parts of his text, their work was used as models for interpreting the aesthetic experience of Chinese calligraphy. For example, in order to elucidate the sensation of calligraphic lines, Zhang adopted from

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<sup>23</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1915, 48, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Liu Gangji, *Shufa meixue jianlun* 書法美學簡論 (A Brief Introduction to the Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy), Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1979; Li Zehou, *The Path of Beauty*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994; Jin Xuezhong, *Shufa meixue tan*, 書法美學談 (A Discussion of Calligraphy Aesthetics), Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 1984; Qiu Zhenzhong, *Shufa de xingtai yu chanshi* 書法的形態與闡釋 (Calligraphic Form: An Explanation), Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1993.

<sup>25</sup> For Clive Bell, 'Significant Form' in art refers to the lines and colours and their combinations.



Puffer the term ‘bodily resonance’, a concept that fits quite well with the traditional aesthetics of Chinese calligraphy. Other adoptions strike the reader as inappropriate. Puffer’s psychological analysis of colours, for instance, is incongruous with a Chinese view of the variations of ink tones. Perhaps some artistic terms, like ‘form’ and ‘style’, are relative to their living aesthetics and cultural backgrounds, and do not translate easily into another culture. This was a frequently encountered challenge whenever Chinese art theorists attempted to adopt a comparative perspective in explaining Chinese arts. At the end of this section, Zhang briefly discussed *shi* 勢 (momentum, power), one of the most important aesthetic categories in Chinese calligraphy criticism. Citing Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872), Zhang claimed that to achieve *shi*, calligraphers have to maintain a uniform style of characters within a calligraphic work, and the ‘centres of gravity’ of all characters in a column should roughly fall in a straight line. Zhang’s discussion of *shi* was far from comprehensive, considering the many dimensions of the term in Chinese calligraphy criticism – *shi* as the tendency of natural things, as the movement of the body and the brush, as the tension within a stroke or character, and as the dynamic configuration of a whole work.<sup>26</sup> At the end of his article, Zhang abruptly stopped the aesthetic discussion and turned to propose a general research outline for the subject of ‘Chinese calligraphy studies’. It could be claimed that Chinese calligraphy studies in the twentieth century did not go beyond Zhang’s outline.

Zhang’s ‘Preface’ is strong evidence for the influence of American and British aesthetics in the early twentieth century, during which period few American and British aestheticians had not been influenced by Benedetto Croce’s theory of art as expression. And there is no wonder that a central thesis of Zhang’s ‘Preface’ is that Chinese calligraphy, as a unique art, is an expression of feelings and emotions.

After graduating from Stanford in 1933, Zhang returned to China and took up a teaching position in the department of history at Tsinghua University. In the philosophy

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<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the term *shi*, see Francois Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China*, New York: Zone Books, 1995.

department of Tsinghua, Zhang also taught a course – Selected Readings of Modern British and American Philosophers, a course that included philosophers like Bosanquet, George Edward Moore, Pierce, and John Dewey.<sup>27</sup> The ‘Preface’ remained his only article on Chinese calligraphy. He died in 1942, at the age of 37.

### Translation of Zhang Yinlin’s

#### ‘A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism’ (1931)<sup>28</sup>

A unique phenomenon in Chinese art history is that language symbols could also be aesthetic objects, and the attention of many of China’s finest minds has been devoted to them. I believe that calligraphic works by famous masters, in terms of their function and value, are the same as what are universally recognised as artworks in the majority of cultures. This is partly revealed by the Chinese combined term *shuhua* (calligraphy-painting). The creation of Chinese calligraphy is based on the shape of Chinese characters, which I term *shuyi*, or ‘the art of writing’, an art that has existed in China for at least two thousand years. Two thousand years of experiences and judgments of this art cannot possibly be grounded in an illusion, and Chinese language symbols must offer unusual possibilities as material for art, and as material there must be some fundamental principle underlying their applicability for it to develop into an art form.

Given this, the following questions have yet to be answered:

1. Are there some essential similarities between Chinese calligraphy and the arts of all cultures, similarities that render Chinese calligraphy an art? Carefully examined, this question in fact contains two further issues: (1) Are there any similarities between calligraphy and all the other arts? (2) Are these similarities the defining elements of art?

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<sup>27</sup> Mary G. Mazur, *Wu Han, Historian: Son of China’s Times*, Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009, 193.

<sup>28</sup> The translation is based on the following edition: Zhang Yinlin, ‘Zhongguo shuyi pipinxue xuyan’ 中國書藝批評學序言, in Chen Rucheng, Li Xinrong, eds., *Zhang Yinlin quanji* 張蔭麟全集 (The Complete Collected Works of Zhang Yinlin), Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2013, 1177-1192.

2. If the art of calligraphy possesses these artistic elements, how are they realised in calligraphic works?
3. Are there some fundamental differences between calligraphy and other arts, differences that make calligraphy a special art? In other words, what are its special strong points and limitations with regard to the art of Chinese calligraphy? What constitutes the 'generic feature' of Chinese calligraphy?
4. What is the aesthetic significance of the art of Chinese calligraphy?

Answers to the above questions can form a new branch of aesthetics that I would call 'The Aesthetics of Chinese Calligraphy'. And based on the principles of aesthetics, we can establish the subject of 'calligraphy criticism', the task of which is to explore the standards of beauty in calligraphy, and illustrate the applications of these standards. This paper, entitled 'A Preface to Chinese Calligraphy Criticism', intends to answer the above questions and lay a foundation for the subject of calligraphy criticism. Lacking artistic training and being short of knowledge of aesthetics, I was neither confident nor satisfied when making the following statements. I venture to publish this article because there has been no investigation of Chinese calligraphy from the perspective of aesthetics and I hope that this paper will inspire more in-depth studies.

#### I. <sup>29</sup>

In order to discuss the peculiarities of 'the art of writing', we need to elucidate the concept of aesthetic experience in the first place. We have various attitudes towards external objects (or presentation of them). For example, if we behold an object and then think about how to utilise it to achieve a goal in life, we adopt a pragmatic attitude to it. If we behold an object, and then analyse its variations and compare it with other things for the purpose of obtaining the general principles within all things, we adopt an investigative attitude to it. If we behold an object with no purpose in mind, and just follow the heart to contemplate it and lose ourselves in the imageries that linger in perception or imagination, we then have an aesthetic attitude. When this aesthetic

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<sup>29</sup> These headings have been added by the translator.

attitude is projected onto external things (or presentations of them), an aesthetic experience arises. This is aesthetic experience in the broad sense, and the so-called beauty lies in the objects of such experience. In a narrow sense, aesthetic experience refers only to the experience of beauty. But, what is beauty?

Perception and imagination are always activated by something that I term ‘perceptual form’ (*jue xiang*).<sup>30</sup> Feelings are internalised in some perceptual forms, while others do not provoke feelings. Opinions vary as to the connotations of feeling, which this paper will not discuss. Denotations of feeling, however, can be grasped by common sense. Readers, please hear the whoosh of cars on the road for a while, and then listen to a Beethoven symphony; or try to read some business correspondence first, and then read a famous poem by Du Fu.<sup>31</sup> Comparing these two groups of experience, we will know what feeling means. In normal circumstances, when we hear cars’ sounds or read business letters, we have some perceptions but no emotions. Hearing a piece of music by Beethoven and reading a famous poem by Du Fu, however, result in both perceptions and feelings. Perceptual forms that arouse feelings can be divided into two types:

(1) Feelings that are irrelevant, or extrinsic to perceptual forms. These feelings are not aroused by the internal quality of perceptual forms, but by another entirely different experience that is casually related to such perceptual forms. The relationship between the two is liable to shifts. Feelings aroused by a perceptual form A could also be evoked by another perceptual form B, even though A and B are distinctly different in nature. Besides that, the relationship between the two lacks universality. Different people have different views on whether a perceptual form can arouse feelings and on the nature of such feelings. For example, if one is pleased by dinner bells, what pleases him is not the bell, but the fact that an adequate diet is ready; if the sound of a bell is replaced by the sound of a drum, he will be pleased by the drum rather than the bell. Those who are

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<sup>30</sup> The term *juexiang* (覺相) is a Buddhist term where *jue* means ‘perception’ and *xiang* means ‘appearance or posture or form’.

<sup>31</sup> Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) was a prominent Chinese poet of the Tang dynasty.

waiting for a bell's call will be pleased, but those on their journeys won't be. As another example, [Bai Juyi, in a ninth-century poem, wrote that]<sup>32</sup>, 'travelling along, the very brightness of the moon saddens the emperor's heart, and the sound of a bell through the evening rain severs his viscera in twain.'<sup>33</sup> The emperor's broken heart and sorrow did not result from the moon and the bell; they were caused by the fact that: 'the soldiers refuse to advance; nothing remains to be done until his beloved concubine of the moth-eyebrows perishes in sight of all.'<sup>34</sup> The emperor's feelings were not evoked by the moon and the bell, but by another scene: 'in the hibiscus he sees her face, in the willow he sees her eyebrows, and how in the presence of these should tears not flow.'<sup>35</sup> Those soldiers who escorted the emperor also saw the moon and heard the bell, but maybe no one felt sad and shed tears.

(2) Feelings that are relevant and intrinsic to perceptual forms. Such feelings lodge in perceptual forms and are dominated by the characteristics and regular patterns of them; these feelings come directly from specific perceptual forms, and only these perceptual forms engender such feelings. The relationship between the feelings and perceptual forms cannot be changed or reversed. Hence anyone who perceives the second type of perceptual form is bound to experience feelings, and such feelings can be described to others. But, exposed to identical things, different people do not necessarily grasp similar perceptual forms, for an individual's cognition of external objects is influenced by previous experiences as well as the present situation. Thus, people's feelings towards the same thing don't necessarily have to be similar; this fact, however, is not detrimental to the universality of the relationship between perceptual forms and feelings. The second type of perceptual form can be further divided into two sub-types:

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<sup>32</sup> Zhang Yinlin here cites Bai Juyi's famous narrative poem 'The Song of Everlasting Regret' (*Changhen ge* 長恨歌) to explain the nature of feelings. Bai Juyi 白居易 (772-846) was a renowned Tang-Dynasty poet, and 'The Song of Everlasting Regret' is probably the best known of all his works.

<sup>33</sup> Based on Herbert Giles's translation with some modifications. John Minford, Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 886.

<sup>34</sup> Based on Herbert Giles's translation with some modifications. John Minford, Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 885-6.

<sup>35</sup> Based on Herbert Giles's translation. John Minford, Joseph S. M. Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, 887.

(2-1) Simple and pure perceptual forms do not allow complexity in organization and variation in sequence, although there are various types of them. Thus feelings lodged in this sub-type are also monotonous and weak, such as gustatory and olfactory forms. Tasty foods and pleasant odours can bring us wonderful sensations. But with a number of tasty foods or pleasant odours, we cannot blend them into a layered structure. If one takes a mixture of several tasty foods at one time, one only experiences a unitary feeling and can't distinguish one from another. If one takes them one after another, the pleasures gained won't change much no matter what one decides to take first and what next.

(2-2) Visual and auditory forms are different. For example, musical tones are diverse for their different pitches, intensities, durations and placements. Visual shapes and colours, because of their differences in arrangement, sequence, proportion and dynamism, can create countless combined forms, and the qualities of the feelings that are lodged in each of the combined forms differ greatly.

The latter perceptual forms that contain structure and can evoke relevant feelings, whether they exist in nature or are human-made, generally engender two kinds of feelings, namely 'positive feeling' and 'negative feeling'.

(1) Positive feeling brings us a cheerful state of mind. With this positive feeling, the restrained can be liberated, and repressed feelings can be vented. To this positive feeling, our spirit and mind feel attached, and we are reluctant to part with it. Most, but not necessarily all, of the positive feelings are pleasurable feelings. Some might be so miserable as to make us weep, some might be so melancholy as to make us hesitate, and some might be so incomprehensible that they provoke a sense of solemnity and mystique. Perceptual forms that internalise these positive feelings can be called 'beautiful', and if these perceptual forms are the result of human endeavour, we call them artworks. Works of Chinese calligraphy have structured perceptual forms, and in appreciating calligraphic works, we can always experience the positive feelings that are

dominated by the internal laws of perceptual forms. Therefore, we can come to a conclusion that Chinese calligraphy is an art.

(2) Negative feelings depress and constrain our minds. It is as if that the constraint cannot be liberated and the pent-up emotion cannot find a vent; we are eager to get rid of these feelings and should not halt there and get lost. Perceptual forms that harbour negative feelings can be called ‘ugly’.

According to the above-mentioned definition of beauty, one knows that ‘beauty’ in this paper in fact consists of ‘the beautiful’ and ‘the sublime’. What is the beautiful, and what is the sublime? Scholars of different ages have offered numerous answers. But I believe that no answer is as profound and vivid as the following two verses written by Du Fu who ridiculed the poets of his time:

The writings of some may be comparable to a kingfisher atop the epidendrum,  
None of them can harness the giant whale in the deep blue sea.<sup>36</sup>

Du Fu held that poets of his day had only reached the realm of beauty, but had not yet reached the realm of the sublime. Regardless of what Du Fu meant precisely, I wonder if there are subtler phrases than ‘a kingfisher atop the epidendrum’ to symbolise ‘the beauty’, and ‘giant whale in the deep blue sea’ to symbolise ‘the sublime’. To put it bluntly, if perceptual forms – which have structures that arouse relevant feelings – generate fierce and forceful powers (spiritual or physical) that overwhelm the heart and meanwhile coexist in harmony with the heart, we call them ‘the sublime’ while perceptual forms that do not produce such an effect can be called ‘the beautiful’. Both ‘the beauty’ and ‘the sublime’ exist in the art of Chinese writing.

The above narrowly defined aesthetic experience, or the experience of beauty, actually includes the experience of creation and the experience of appreciation. The two

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<sup>36</sup> English translation based on Shirleen Wong, ‘The Quatrains of Du Fu’, *Monumenta Serica*, Vol. 29, 1970, 153-154.

actually have no essential distinction, and only differ in their sources. During the recent modern period, one of the most popular schools of aesthetic theories believed that art is the expression of feelings. It is a shallow argument that creators first have a kind of rootless feeling in mind and then express it through artworks. If so, experience of beauty in creation must be fundamentally different from that in appreciation. The feelings of viewers are generally evoked in the course of appreciation; we can appreciate artworks at any moment, but we cannot pre-store in the heart a kind of emotion homogenous to that inspired in appreciation. This ‘expression theory’, in fact, has no basis. British aesthetician Bernard Bosanquet once wrote, ‘We must not suppose that we first have a disembodied feeling, and then set out to find an embodiment adequate to it. In a word, imaginative expression creates the feeling in creating its embodiment, and the feeling so created not merely cannot be otherwise expressed, but cannot otherwise exist, than in and through the embodiment which imagination has found for it.’<sup>37</sup> If so, when a special feeling exists in its embodied perceptual form, the former would no longer be dominated by the patterns of the latter.<sup>38</sup> There is no ‘relevant’ connection between feeling and perceptual forms, and according to the above definition of beauty, what we sense here is not the experience of beauty. Thus, for the experience of beauty, the expression of feeling is nothing more than the emergence of feeling. In this regard, creation and appreciation are the same. When examining the art of writing, we should pay attention to this point. Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) once wrote, ‘generally before we practice calligraphy, write poems or essays, we should store in our mind some kind of force or vital energy, and then express it through brush and ink.’<sup>39</sup> I personally believe that Zeng’s opinion is fallacious.

## II.

None of the existing classifications of art are satisfactory; all cannot attend to one thing

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<sup>37</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1923, 34.

<sup>38</sup> It is unclear about what Zhang Yinlin means by this.

<sup>39</sup> Zeng Guofan 曾國藩 (1811-1872) was a Chinese official as well as a Confucian scholar of the late Qing government.



without neglecting the other, or include one point without excluding another. This section tries to enumerate the existing classifications, and examine which category Chinese calligraphy falls under. And in this way, we can explicate the characteristics of Chinese calligraphy and its status among the arts.

(1) By the sensory organs involved in aesthetic experience, we can classify the arts into visual art and auditory art. Visual art includes painting, sculpture, architecture, dancing, etc. Auditory art includes music, poetry, etc. The most obvious inadequacy of this classification lies in that it fails to categorise some multi-sensory arts, such as drama and music-accompanied dance. Poetry also resorts to non-auditory imagery aroused by language. According to this classification, Chinese calligraphy should be classified as visual art.

(2) By the state of movement or stillness of aesthetic objects, we can classify arts into spatial art and temporal art. With its various parts existing simultaneously, the aesthetic object of spatial art is stable, such as painting, sculpture, and architecture. The aesthetic object of temporal art is subject to continuous changes; its constituent parts occur one after another, such as music, poetry, drama, dancing, etc. According to this classification, Chinese calligraphy falls under the heading of spatial art.

(3) By the means or tools used in artistic practice, we can classify arts into graphic art (such as painting), plastic art (such as sculpture and architecture), and linguistic art (such as poetry and the novel). A flaw in this classification is that many arts are omitted or can fall under various categories. According to this classification, Chinese calligraphy should be included as a graphic art (rather than a linguistic art and this point will be discussed later).

(4) In discussing artistic forms, Bosanquet differentiated *a priori* form (or 'directly expressive' form) and representative form. *A priori* forms are types of perceptual forms whose 'outward appearance' embodies properties of emotions, and the revelation of these emotions does not rely on meanings of the perceptual forms. Only a sight of the following forms stirs up our feelings before we examine their denotations: the stability and vigour of a square, the grace and ease of a curve, the

lightness and liveliness of dance moves, and the openness and brightness of plain colours. The expressiveness of representative forms, however, has to rely on their meanings that can only be acquired with the aid of knowledge and past experience. Thus, the relationship between representative forms and the feelings they evoke is indirect. 'For instance, a man's laughing might be the expression of pain or anger, if we had not learned by experience that it is otherwise. Green trees might be the withering ones, and brown trees the flourishing ones; without special experience of human bodies you could not know how or when their appearance indicates vitality or character; without experience of animals you could not know that the drawing of the bull hunt indicates activity, courage, ferocity. You cannot read these things off from the patterns or the colour-combinations; you have ultimately to arrive at them by virtue of the knowledge of facts. When you come to human portraiture, the reading of the human countenance, geometrical properties of lines and shapes helps you not at all, or hardly at all. You have to rely upon special lessons, learned in the school of life.'<sup>40</sup> But, even for representative forms, the perceptual forms and the feelings aroused by them are not utterly irrelevant. For example, 'it is not a mere dead fact of my experience that a man's body in a certain position indicates a certain sort or phase of vitality. It is true that I must know something about a man's body before I can live myself into it at all; but when I can do so, the attitude of the disc-thrower's body is after all necessary in relation to my feeling, and not a bare disconnected fact. It has, to use my former phrase, *something of a priori* expressiveness. When you know its structure, its position does become inevitable.'<sup>41</sup> In the realm of art, there are pure 'directly expressive' forms, and meanwhile, representative forms may also incorporate some 'directly expressive' forms. Art that relies on directly expressive form as its primary component is called 'direct expressive art', such as music and architecture. Musical expression is the closest to pure or *a priori* expression, followed by architecture. Art that relies on representative form as its primary component is called 'representative art', such as painting, sculpture and

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<sup>40</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1923, 44-45.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Bosanquet, *Three Lectures on Aesthetics*, London: Macmillan, 1923, 47.

literature.

So, according to the above classification, under which category will Chinese calligraphy fall? The answer is ‘directly expressive art’. Although Chinese calligraphy uses meaningful symbols as its tool, the beauty of this art lies solely in the forms of the symbols, and is irrelevant to the meanings of the symbols. What actually constitutes the beauty of Chinese calligraphy are the lustre of the brushstrokes and ink variations, the structural patterns, and the arrangement of space; [its beauty] does not depend on any other meanings.

Some say that Chinese characters derive from pictographs. Although Chinese characters have multiplied and evolved, and the character-scripts changed, the characters we use today still maintain the imprint of pictographs. Why would we identify Chinese calligraphy as a directly expressive art? My answer is that, as a result of symbolisation, the relationship between the pure pictographic characters and the objects they represent could by no means be perceived by instinct. If one is not well versed in Chinese characters, he or she can by no means understand that the following two Chinese characters are representations of two natural objects: the character 馬 (meaning ‘horse’) and a real horse, the character 魚 (meaning ‘fish’) and a real fish. In terms of sensation, the function of pictographic elements has vanished in Chinese characters. Even if the pictographic elements had not vanished, the art of calligraphy still would not resort to them. The reason the two characters of 馬 and 魚 contain aesthetic properties is not that they embody a certain emotion we experience in viewing the postures of the real horse or fish. This is an extremely obvious fact. In the preface to the poem *A Song of Sword-Dancing to a Girl-Pupil of Lady Gongsun*, Du Fu wrote:<sup>42</sup>

Zhang Xu of Wu County was adept in cursive script.<sup>43</sup> In Yexian, he had seen Lady Gongsun performing western-region sword dances several times, and thereafter [his] cursive script had been refined.

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<sup>42</sup> Lady Gongsun was one of the most prominent dancers in the Tang Dynasty.

<sup>43</sup> Zhang Xu 張旭 (675-759) was an eighth-century Chinese calligrapher, poet, and scholar-official. He is best remembered as a calligrapher.

In his *Supplement to the State History of the Tang*, Li Zhao (active 806-825 A.D) also recorded that,

Zhang Xu once said that I got the intent and will of the brushwork after seeing a princess's porter struggling to make his way on the road and I got its spirit after watching Lady Gongsun performing swords.

Stories of this type abound in the history of calligraphy, and they are not necessarily absurd. If the subtlety of calligraphic art is brought about by the imitation of nature (in a broad sense), there is no doubt that Chinese calligraphy is a representative art. Imitation and representation are not identical. There is abstract imitation, and as well there is detailed or exact imitation. The moon has the property of roundness; [if one] draws a circle by roughly sketching the contour of the moon, this circle could be called an abstract imitation of the moon rather than a representation of it, because there are many round-shaped objects besides the moon. [If the] circle bears the colour and lustre of the moon, the distribution of the light and dark, which is exclusive to the moon, then it is a representation of the moon and this type is what we call exact imitation. Abstract imitations neither take on meanings of the objects they imitate nor stir up emotions by virtue of such meanings; thus they can yet be regarded as directly expressive. Music is the most directly expressive of all arts. However, Aristotle characterised music as the most imitative, for music directly simulates emotions of human beings. Emotions cannot exist independently; they have to be attached to a sort of imagery (*shi xiang*).<sup>44</sup> Those which directly imitate emotions are actually imitating the imageries that harbour such emotions. There is no exact detailed imitation in Chinese calligraphy; it employs abstract imitation instead. Vigorous actions and the contours of objects (including the human body) are all that Chinese calligraphy is imitating.

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<sup>44</sup> The term *shi xiang* 事象, literally meaning 'object image', often appeared in the works of China's Republican Period.

(5) We can divide art into pure art and utilitarian art through analysing whether the structures of perceptual forms are restricted by practical purposes and whether an art is created to cater for implemental properties. Generally speaking, the distinction between pure art and utilitarian art lies in whether the expressions of feelings are ends in themselves, or means to other ends, whether the expression is influenced by other non-artistic purposes. Based on this classification, many arts can be both pure and utilitarian. Paintings can be used to express emotions, but can also work as advertisements; poetry and novels can express feeling, but can also be didactic. Whether an artwork is pure depends on the choice of its creator. An art may be dominated by non-artistic purposes, which does not mean that it's indispensable to instrumental properties. [Thus,] the distinction between pure art and utilitarian art needs to be modified. All arts, no matter whether they could serve non-artistic functions or not, can be called pure art if they are in essence not fit for non-artistic purposes, such as the above mentioned painting and literature; otherwise, they are utilitarian art, such as architecture and Chinese calligraphy. The production of utilitarian artistic tools, in the very beginning, does not intend to satisfy a kind of artistic desire. The buildings, instruments (including weapons) and clothes of the ancient people are simple and unadorned, as they seek only practical utility. After their surviving needs are satisfied, they have spare time to attach pleasing forms to their living tools; they either polish them and organise them in order, or carve and embellish them. As a result, such implements or artefacts fulfil two purposes at the same time: (1) utility and (2) beauty. The possibility of the latter was actually restrained by the former. However, there are artefacts which contain great artistic possibilities within this limit; they gradually display their artistic purposes, develop their artistic functions, and can then rival pure artworks. Architecture serves as an example, and the art of calligraphy another. Chinese writing started as signs to preserve the memory of things, replacing knotted cords.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Yi Jing*, or the *Book of Changes* has the earliest record of the function of knotted cords and the origin of Chinese writing: 上古結繩而治，後世聖人易之以書，which means that 'in the highest antiquity, government was carried on successfully by the use of knotted cords (to preserve the memory of things), and in subsequent ages the sages substituted for these written characters and bonds.' Translation is based on James Legge, *The I Ching*, New York: Dover Publications, 1963, 385.

When Chinese characters were beautified [in later times], their basic forms were almost stabilised by practical purposes and blind chance. Thereafter, although the shapes of Chinese scripts had evolved and changed several times, the guiding principle [behind the characters] still seemed to be practical and habitual rather than artistic. In *Shuowen guangyi* (An Analysis of *Shuowen*)<sup>46</sup>, Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) repeatedly referred to the cases in which calligraphers in the Six Dynasties (222-589) changed the forms of characters for the sake of beauty. For instance, [calligraphers then] increased or decreased some characters' strokes and inverted their positions, but it seems that there are not many such cases. Thus, what I have said needs to be modified. Chinese calligraphy is not an art in which calligraphers can draw the lines of their own free will; the structure of lines has mostly been standardised by non-artistic factors, and calligraphers must be bounded by this framework. For this reason, the art of Chinese calligraphy has the lowest freedom in creation among all arts. Nevertheless, there remains space for expression of emotions.

Some people would raise the following question. Since both Chinese calligraphy and literature employ written characters as tools, are they both utilitarian arts? The answer is no. Although both calligraphy and literature use characters as their tools, meanings of the tools in these two arts are different. Chinese calligraphy truly utilises written characters as its tool, while the tool of literature is actually literary language. The values of literature are attached to the forms of language rather than the forms of linguistic marks or characters. Take the same poem, whether it's transcribed by a famous calligrapher or an unskilled scribe, in 'Zhao style' or 'Song typeface', the value of the poem remains unchanged.<sup>47</sup> After all, we are not concerned with their distinct calligraphic values here.

Painting traditionally has been paired with calligraphy in Chinese art history. It

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<sup>46</sup> *Shuowen* 說文 is a shortened term for *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (An Explanation of Written Characters), an early second-century Chinese dictionary. The book *Shuowen guangyi* 說文廣義 is a pioneer study of *Shuowen jiezi* in the early Qing Dynasty.

<sup>47</sup> 'Zhao style' refers to the style of the prominent Yuan dynasty calligrapher Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322). 'Song typeface' (宋體) is a printing style that developed during the Song Dynasty, and is currently the most common style for printing in China.

looks as if the art of calligraphy, among all arts, has the closest relation with Chinese painting. This is indeed the case in terms of the materials (these two arts use). First, both calligraphy and painting are visual, spatial arts. Second, both employ linear forms and lines as their materials. However, taking all of this art's properties into consideration, Chinese calligraphy is in fact most similar to architecture. Firstly, both are spatial arts. Secondly, both are direct expressive arts. Thirdly, both are utilitarian arts. But concerning the last, calligraphy and architecture differ significantly. The forms of architecture are relevant to their practical purposes: the position of windows, the length and breadth of halls, the height of walls, all of them cannot be arbitrarily decided. Calligraphy is different. To write a set group of characters, one can choose seal script, clerical script, cursive script, regular script, a certain phonetic alphabet and Roman alphabet, or [he or she] can invent another method. As there is no close connection between the forms [of Chinese characters] and their practical purposes, calligraphers cannot but adopt an arbitrary habitual pattern. Once the pattern [of an art] is set, it cannot be easily transformed, and consequently, there is little freedom in the creation [of this art]. Architectural forms could be closely related to the practical purposes, and the practical purposes don't impose tight restrictions on its forms besides, therefore there is considerable creative freedom in this art.

### III.

Chinese characters are organised by 'brushstrokes'. Geometrically, brushstrokes are the dividing lines of a plane. Aesthetically, brushstrokes are conducive to displaying a three-dimensional quality, or creating a three-dimensional illusion in a two-dimensional space, which can be manifested in Chinese calligraphy as well as painting. When we appreciate an excellent handwritten Chinese character and forget, for the time being, its two-dimensionality, we feel that the constituent parts of this character are not aligned. Sharing the same plane with its background, some strokes are angular with bones and some thick with flesh.<sup>48</sup> Aesthetically speaking, a brushstroke is in fact a shape, and

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<sup>48</sup> Zhang Yinlin here uses the imageries of bone and flesh to explain the three-dimensionality of calligraphic

the contours of shapes are lines. Thus, the main elements of Chinese calligraphy contain not only lines but also shapes. In some sense, brushstrokes can also be called lines, or thick lines; those geometrical lines that have length but no width do not actually exist in aesthetics. As it appears in the following paragraphs, the word ‘line’ is used in its broad sense and is equivalent to ‘brushstroke’. Although Chinese characters have only eight basic strokes, which are usually called the ‘eight laws of the character *yong* (eternal)’,<sup>49</sup> contours and brush movements for every stroke have infinite variations. Therefore, though the shapes of Chinese characters have already been settled, there remains sufficient room for artistic creation.

Without colour, shape cannot be perceived. Therefore, colour is also an element of the art of calligraphy. To make shapes perceivable, one has to use at least two colours: first, the colour of the shapes, and second, the colour of the background. The use of colour in calligraphic art is restricted to the minimum needs, and this is probably a reason that this art does not resort to a mixture of various colours. It is graphic art that employs lines, colours and their combinations to achieve its beauty. In graphic arts, shape is an alterable element that we can utilise to harness the element of colour, and as a result, we can achieve unity in multiplicity, an important condition of beauty. In Chinese calligraphy, shapes are much restrained by conventions, and calligraphers cannot change them casually to accord with complex colours. So, the simplicity of colours in this art is latent in the natural restrictions of Chinese characters. This could also explain why the art of calligraphy does not resort to the varying shades of colours.

Since the art of calligraphy only uses two colours, selection of them must meet the following two conditions:

- (1) One of the two colours should be the most eye-pleasing, or one of the most eye-

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forms. In Chinese calligraphy criticism, using imageries of organism or physiology is a very important method to analyse a piece of calligraphy. For a detailed discussion of this phenomenon, see John Hay, ‘The Human Body as a Microcosmic Source of Macrocosmic Values in Calligraphy’, in Susan Bush, Christian Murck, eds., *Theories of the Arts in China*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981, 74-102.

<sup>49</sup> As a calligraphic term, ‘eight Laws of the character *yong*’, or *yong zi ba fa* 永字八法, means that there are eight basic brushstrokes in Chinese calligraphic practice and these eight strokes happily constitute the character *yong* (eternal). For a brief discussion of the basic strokes in Chinese calligraphy, see Peter Sturman, *Mi Fu: Style and the Art of Calligraphy in Northern Song China*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, 15-16.



pleasing.

(2) The two must be complementary colours.

The juxtaposition of two colours, according to the results of psychological experiments, is the most pleasing when the two are complementary. In fact, it is impossible that both of the two colours are the most pleasing, or that one of them is the most pleasing colour while the other comes second. Therefore, the first condition does not state that ‘one has to use the two most pleasing colours’. If stated in that way, the two conditions will contradict each other.

Generally, Chinese calligraphic works use ‘white background and black characters’, which is decreed for practical purposes and by convention. Luckily, this manner of colouring happens to comply with the above two conditions. Black and white makes a pair of complementary colours, and according to the findings of psychological experiments, white seems to be the most eye-pleasing of all colours. Ethel D. Puffer (1872-1950) once wrote, ‘Colour, too, if distinct, not too over-bright, nor too much extended in field, is in itself pleasing. The single colours have been the object of comparatively little study. Experiment seems to show that the colours containing most brightness – white, red, and yellow – are preferred. Baldwin...finds that the colours range themselves in order of attractiveness, blue, white, red, green, brown. Further corrections lay more emphasis upon the white.’<sup>50</sup> White, at least, is one of the most attractive colours, and it’s been widely used as the background colour in calligraphic works. Thus, black characters and a white background are surely an optimal match. Therefore, we know that those who write with coloured ink and those who intend to increase beauty with colourful papers, in fact, depart from the normal practice and disorder this genre of art.

Though Chinese calligraphy does not use other colours, a combination of black and white is full of beauty with lustre. A few years ago, in a speech entitled ‘A Guide

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<sup>50</sup> Ethel D. Puffer, *The Psychology of Beauty*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905, 94.

to Chinese Calligraphy' at Tsinghua University, Liang Qichao said:<sup>51</sup>

Chinese handwriting is rather odd. Without variations of colours, without the shades, and with only ink, uniform black ink, one can display beauty. Well-written characters, shining with the ink's lustre on paper, are full of spirit resonance. Sophisticated brushstrokes, superior Chinese inks, after hundreds or thousands of years, are still glittering. This beauty is what we call 'the beauty of light'. Western paintings, with a certain mystique, also stress light. As to paintings, I am a layman who can't tell the good from the bad. But I had been provided with some guidance on the light of Western paintings. Although I did not capture the nuance of them, I can sense that those works that claim to have light are indeed stunning. However, light flowing from Western paintings is probably generated by the combinations of colours or the varying shades of them...Chinese calligraphic works, with the two colours of black and white, are able to bring light, which is probably a rare case in the art world.<sup>52</sup>

Where the painting theory is concerned, the present writer is also a layman and feels ashamed of being unable to contribute more to Liang's speech.

Discussion of colour comes to an end. The next question is: How do 'brushstrokes' or lines express emotions? This question could be further divided into two parts: (1) How does the simple element of a single line express emotions? (2) How do the structures and combinations of lines express emotions? (A single line in itself forms a structure. The beauty of a single line and the beauty of its structure are mutually dependent, and if separated the beauty of the two will be impaired. For the convenience of analysis, this paper treats them separately. It is not the case that the beauty of a character is the sum of the single lines' beauty and the structures' beauty. In fact, if there

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<sup>51</sup> Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) was an influential reformist and scholar of late Qing Dynasty and early Republic.

<sup>52</sup> Liang Qichao, 'Shufa zhidao' (A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy), *Tsinghua Weekly*, Vol. 26, No.9, December 1926.

is no beauty of single lines, there is no beauty of structures, and vice versa.) To some degree, questions of this type are unanswerable, and what we can do is to analyse and expound the expressive factors in the art of calligraphy. It is beyond our capability to answer how these various factors acquire the ability to express emotions.

It can't be denied that lines can express emotions by virtue of their own characteristics. Like colours and tones, lines have a kind of abstract temperament and vitality. [As Dewitt H. Parker wrote:]

Lines give rise to motor impulses and make one feel and dream, as music does...The life of lines is more allied to that of tones than of colours because it possesses a dynamic movement quality which is absent from the latter. This life is, in fact, twofold: on the one hand it is a career, with a beginning, middle, and end, something to be willed or enacted; on the other hand it is a temperament or character, a property of the line as a whole, to be felt. These two aspects of aesthetic lines are closely related; they stand to one another much as the temperament or character of a man stands to his life history, of which it is at once the cause and the result. Just as we get a total impression of a man's nature by following the story of his life, so we get the temperamental quality of lines by following them with the eye; and just as all of our knowledge of a man's acts enters into our intuition of his nature, so we discover the character of the total line by a synthesis of its successive elements.

Lines are infinite in their possible variations, and the fine shades of feeling which they may express exceed the number of words in the emotional vocabulary of any language. Moreover, in any drawing, the character of each line is partly determined through the context of other lines; you cannot take it abstractly with entire truth. It is, however, possible to find verbal equivalents for the character of the main types of lines. Horizontal lines convey a feeling of repose, of quiet...vertical lines, of solemnity, dignity, aspiration...crooked lines

of conflict and activity...while curved lines have always been recognized as soft and voluptuous and tender...<sup>53</sup>

Putting aside, for the moment, the issue of lines' structures and combinations, I believe that the expressiveness of individual lines is determined by four factors.<sup>54</sup>

(1) The perception of lines is an active process. In order to perceive a line we have to follow it with the eye. Besides that, this process of the perception of a line requires of us an energy of attention to the successive elements of the line as we pass over them and a further expenditure of energy in remembering and synthesising them into a whole. This energy, since it is evoked by the line and is not connected with any definite inner striving of the self, is felt by us to belong to the line, to be an element in its life, as clearly its own as its shape. For example, a line with many sudden turns or changes of direction is an energetic and exciting line because it demands in perception a constant and difficult and shifting attention; a straight line, on the contrary, because it is simple and unvarying in its demands upon the attention, is monotonous and reposeful; while the curved line, with its lawful and continuous changes, at once stimulating yet never distracting attention, possesses the character of progressive and happy action.<sup>55</sup>

(2) The above-mentioned psycho-physical response to lines will be further reinforced and enriched by the function of 'bodily resonance'. As I have said earlier in this section, brushstrokes or lines not only divide a two-dimensional plane, but also create a three-dimensional illusion. In fact, we have experienced in material objects forms that are homogenous to that of the brushstrokes. This experience does not only resort to 'demands of the eye', but also to the touch of hands. To put it in another way, the shapes of the material objects emulate the traces of bodily movements. Hereafter, when we behold similar forms, our body will have a sense of *déjà vu* if we can touch them and follow their traces with the eye. This is what is called the function of 'bodily

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<sup>53</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 259-61.

<sup>54</sup> In summarizing these four factors, as Zhang Yinlin wrote in the footnote, he consulted the following two books: DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 261-63; Ethel D. Puffer, *The Psychology of Beauty*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905, 103-04.

<sup>55</sup> Several points of this paragraph are based on DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 261-62.

resonance'. While viewing the artworks by famous calligraphers, I have diverse experiences: the toughness of steep mountains, a feeling of gentleness and tenderness, the chill of a cutting edge, soul-stirring cadence, and perceptions of imagery such as craggy cliffs or birds flapping in the high sky. Most probably, they result from the 'bodily resonance'.

(3) Lines also suggest to us the attitudes of our bodies. The locus of a line triggers our bodies' movement towards a homogeneous position, resulting in corresponding feelings that we will have in a certain similar posture. This could be called 'body mimesis'. Lines may be straight and rising, rigid or dignified or joyously expanding; they may be horizontal and lie down and rest; they may be falling and sorrowful.<sup>56</sup> The *shi* of lines may be tense or relaxed, steady or lithe.<sup>57</sup>

(4) The sight of a line suggests the drawing of it, the sweep of the brush that made it. When I appreciate calligraphic artworks, I do not simply stare at them impassively. I try to reproduce in my mind the actions of dots and strokes, to capture the energy or tension (*shi*) between the opposing strokes, twists and turns, and to apprehend the intonation within all the strokes. Viewers recreate while tracing the creative process of the artists. We ourselves, in the imagination once more, may recreate the line after the artist, and feel, just as he must have felt, the mastery, ease, vigour, or delicacy of the execution into the line itself.<sup>58</sup>

In order to acquire this kind of experience, a viewer must have a considerable understanding of the calligraphic skills. The viewer must at least: (1) be capable of following the 'brushstroke tracks' of individual characters, (the perception described in the first factor also necessitates this condition), (2) understand the relationship between brushstroke techniques and shapes of calligraphic lines, and is able to roughly reproduce a line's creation after viewing its shape.

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<sup>56</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 262.

<sup>57</sup> *Shi* 勢 is an important aesthetic category in Chinese aesthetics, meaning 'disposition or circumstance, power or potential'. The same term *shi* denotes different concepts in different contexts, and accordingly the translator, in the rest of the Preface, chooses different English concepts to translate this term. For a discussion of the term in Chinese art, and culture at large, see Francois Jullien, *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China*, New York: Zone Books, 1995.

<sup>58</sup> DeWitt H. Parker, *The Principles of Aesthetics*, Boston: Silver, Burdett & Co., 1920, 262.

Up to this point, the present writer has tried to evade an issue, with which this paragraph intends to deal. This issue is as follows. All arts must have universality, which means ordinary individuals should be able to grasp the feelings expressed in an artwork, and the feelings they grasp should be roughly similar. At a minimum level, the appeal of an artwork's beauty should have no borders. But this seems to be not the case for the art of calligraphy. People from the Western world have come to appreciate Chinese painting. But when it comes to Chinese calligraphy, although the Westerners have come into contact with Chinese artefacts for more than three hundred years, hardly anyone can recognise its beauty. Even in today's China, there are very few who can appreciate this art. Is it because of a traditional prejudice resulting from the bitter legacy of the Chinese imperial examination system that people do not regard calligraphy as a genuine art? I predict that a fair number of people would voice such doubts, and my response is as follows: the universality of art means that ordinary individuals can appreciate a specific art genre after receiving proper training. Generally speaking, all normal people have the potential to appreciate art, but they may not obtain the faculty to do that. Technically speaking, the more intelligence and experience an art requires in its appreciation, the fewer the people who can appreciate it. Thus, a lot of famous works in the history of music, architecture and painting have 'aristocratic features'. As pointed out above, [understanding how] the factors influence calligraphic expressiveness requires a knowledge of technical skills. And since there is hardly a Westerner who has studied calligraphic skills, it is not surprising that Westerners cannot see its beauty. For the same reason, few contemporary Chinese can appreciate the art of calligraphy.

In the above-cited speech 'A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy', Mr. Liang Qichao said:

Writing Chinese characters completely relies on the force of the brush. The presence or absence of vigour within the strokes distinguishes the good characters from the bad ones. Viewing a writer setting a single stroke on paper, we can tell at once. With regard to other arts, one can add and change. For

instance, while drawing, we can prepare a draft in the beginning, and then paint, and we can modify the painting if it's not right. This is especially the case for oil painting. [A painter who] originally paints figures can change the subject into landscapes. Carving, for example, attaches importance to the force of wrists, but this does not mean that carving is not subject to change once a line is carved. Even more alterable is architecture. Buildings that are not beautiful can be demolished and rebuilt. For all of the arts, one can take remedial actions, like tracing, adding or modifying.

With regard to Chinese writing, once a brushstroke is put on paper, it is either good or bad. It cannot be replenished or changed, as the more you fill it, the clumsier it becomes, and the more you change it, the uglier it looks. [Brushstrokes that] follow the tendency and are completed without any let-up best embody vital forces. [Calligraphic works] that entail forces are dynamic, vigorous and lively; those that have no forces are stiff, weary and dull. Viewing a work of painting, it's not easy for us to tell the painter's force that is embodied in the lines. Viewing a work of calligraphy, it's very easy to identify whether it contains force or not. Even though you can make copies, you can only imitate the form, and cannot emulate the strength or force in the brushstrokes. It can be said that a copy nearly reproduces [the original work], but it's not easy for one's copy to be as powerful as the original.<sup>59</sup>

Mr. Liang's speech made two points clear: (1) One of the special restrictions (or special merits) in Chinese calligraphy is that every brushstroke needs to be executed without stopping and cannot be changed; (2) Lines that are completed in one go particularly embody a sense of power or force. Against these two points, we can raise the following two questions: (1) Why do lines that are completed in one go particularly

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<sup>59</sup> Liang Qichao, 'Shufa zhidao' (A Guide to Chinese Calligraphy), *Tsinghua Weekly*, Vol. 26, No.9, December 1926.

embody a sense of power or force? (2) Why does the art of calligraphy have restrictions that discourage any changes and modifications?

Mr. Liang's second point can't be the cause of the first point. If the first point that Chinese calligraphy discourages any changes is a result of the second point that lines written in one go are particularly expressive, then all the other arts that use lines should have the same restrictions. But why does this only exist in the art of calligraphy? There must be some other reasons that could explain why Chinese calligraphy is the only case.

I'll start with the first question. As pointed out earlier, the complete appreciation of a brushstroke requires of viewers an energy of attention to follow a line's successive elements and synthesise them into a whole. It requires that viewers reproduce the creative actions in their mind. A brushstroke that was modified or changed presents shades of ink colours and inconsistent linear forms, which will leave traces of repairing and swelling. If so, a single brushstroke is actually split into several incongruous parts. It is not easy for viewers to analyse [a line like this] and synthesise [the successive parts of the line into a whole], as it distracts the viewers' attentions from concentrating on the movement of the line. As a result, viewers get slack and can't feel the tension within the line. This is the first reason that modifying and changing undermine the expression of the force and energy. After modifications or changes, several brushstrokes will overlap one another. And with several brushstrokes overlapping and covering one another, no single brushstroke can be viewed in its original appearance. It's like tongues not being able to taste the original flavour when different flavours are blended, and eyes not able to perceive the original colour when various colours are mixed. If one cannot see the original shapes of brushstrokes, it's hard or even impossible to reproduce [in his or her mind] the creative actions. But as I pointed out earlier, the expression of forces largely depends on the mental reproduction of creative activities on the part of the viewers. This is the second reason that modifying and changing impair the expression of the force.

Now I turn to the second question. There are two reasons that could explain why



only the art of calligraphy has restrictions that limit modifications and changes. Firstly, although other graphic arts – besides the art of calligraphy – employ lines as a material for expression, they don't regard lines as the sole material; colours, meanings of pictures, and the associations that are triggered by the meanings are all sources of beauty for other graphic arts. Meanings of a painting are not closely related to its lines, thus when we view a painting, we could ignore the traces of modifications if they are not particularly obvious. The art of calligraphy alone uses lines as its sole material, to which viewers' full attention is devoted, and thus defects caused by any modification [of lines] are especially noticeable. Secondly, with the exception of Chinese calligraphy, it's impossible for the other arts to complete a work with lines drawn in one go, as they are supposed to represent the complexity or looseness of exterior shapes and to depict geometrically correct shapes. If one envisages a painter drawing a desk, a chair, a tree trunk, or the silhouette of a beauty with lines that are all executed in one go, that might be quite an awkward image.

Discussions of the expressive factors of individual lines come to an end. Now I will discuss the expressive factors that are embodied in the structures or combinations of brushstrokes. Zeng Guofan had it that the structure of brushstrokes is composed of two aspects – *ti* and *shi*.<sup>60</sup> [Zeng wrote that] '*ti* is the compositional structure of individual Chinese characters and *shi* means the tension or momentum between the characters and columns.'<sup>61</sup>

(1) The beauty of *ti* lies in two factors.

(1a) Balance.

In a broad sense, balance means that the constituent components of characters, their varied weight and length, coordinate with each other, which enables the 'the centre of gravity' of a characters to lie in its median line. As a result, the force or power on both

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<sup>60</sup> The Chinese term for body, *ti* 體 in calligraphy criticism denotes both 'style' and 'compositional structure.' The combined term *tishi* 體勢 is also used in Chinese calligraphy criticism.

<sup>61</sup> Zeng Guofan, *Zeng Guofan Quanjì: Riji* (A Complete Collection of Zeng Guofan: Diary), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1994, 638.

sides [of the median line] are equal, and there is no disproportion. In a narrow sense, balance is symmetry, meaning two similar parts are evenly matched with each other. If the entirety [of a character] is constituted by two similar or corresponding parts, we call it ‘complete symmetry’, such as the Chinese characters 門 (‘door’), 米 (‘rice’), and 田 (‘field’). If only a part [of a character] is constituted by two corresponding parts, we call it ‘incomplete symmetry’, such as the Chinese characters 們 (an adjunct pronoun indicating plural), 氣 (‘gas, air, or force’), 畝 (a unit of area in China). Symmetry is conducive to balance in the broad sense, but balance in the broad sense does not necessarily result from symmetry.

Why and how do balanced structures especially evoke pleasant sensations? I believe that the answer lies in the aforementioned theory of ‘body mimesis’. Viewing the tendency of a character will arouse our feelings in a homogeneous bodily posture. Our bodies are most physically comfortable in a state of balance (according to the above definition), thus balanced structures can especially evoke pleasant sensations. Some people would question the present writer: ‘Why have you just used the theory of ‘body mimesis’ to explain the beauty of individual lines? Isn’t it the case that some individual lines have unbalanced shapes?’ My response is as follows: our feelings for individual lines are transitional and dynamic, while our feelings for structures are structural, synthetical, and motionless. If the body is in motion, it will not feel uncomfortable even in an unbalanced state; the body feels uncomfortable if it stops in an unbalanced state. A slanted brushstroke will reach a balanced state after being offset by other brushstrokes, however a slanted character, against other characters, can’t make us feel balanced.

#### (1b) Rhythm.

Spatial rhythm means a well-regulated arrangement of similar forms. If the entirety of a Chinese character is composed of similar strokes that are parallel and isometric, we call it a ‘complete rhythm’, such as the Chinese characters 三 (‘three’), 玉 (‘jade’), and 冊 (‘volume’). If only a part of a character is composed of similar strokes that are parallel and isometric, we call it a ‘incomplete rhythm’, such as the Chinese characters

鳥 ('bird'), 珍 ('treasure'), and 飛 ('fly').

How can rhythms imply a sense of beauty? Two theories, coexisting and having no interference, could answer this question. The first theory can be named as 'the fulfilment of expectations'. It holds that when we follow a rhythmized form, we expect the emergence of successive similar parts. And if [several successive expectations are] continuously satisfied, pleasant sensations will result from the fulfilment of these expectations. The second theory can be called 'rhythm as the principle of individuation'. This theory not only explains the beauty of rhythm, but also the beauty of symmetry. In symmetrical and rhythmized forms, [what we perceive is] the recurrence of identical structures and the coordination of dissimilar parts. Using the word 'symmetry' to encompass the above-mentioned 'symmetry' and 'rhythm', Santayana said:

Symmetry is here what metaphysicians call a principle of individuation. By the emphasis which it lays upon the recurring elements, it cuts up the field into determinate units; all that lies between the beats is one interval, one individual. If there were no recurrent impressions, no corresponding points, the field of perception would remain a fluid continuum, without defined and recognizable divisions. The outlines of most things are symmetrical because we choose what symmetrical lines we find to be the boundaries of objects. Their symmetry is the condition of their unity, and their unity of their individuality and separate existence...If symmetry, then, is a principle of individuation and helps us to distinguish objects, we cannot wonder that it helps us to enjoy the perception. For our intelligence loves to perceive; water is not more grateful to a parched throat than a principle of comprehension to a confused understanding. Symmetry clarifies, and we all know that light is sweet.<sup>62</sup>

## (2) *Shi*

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<sup>62</sup> George Santayana, *The Sense of Beauty: Being the Outlines of Aesthetic Theory*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896, 93-94.

In order to create *shi* (the momentum or tension between characters and columns), calligraphers sometimes also employ rhythms, such as the alternation of big and small, or light and heavy characters in the running-script and cursive-script [calligraphic works]. But one can't use such alternations frequently and should not make many successive changes each time, as Chinese calligraphic works are also created for utilitarian purposes, such as letters, epitaphs and other kinds of inscriptions. In order to fulfil the expectations for another art, literature for instance, the characters one can use in a calligraphic work are limited. Calligraphers cannot choose characters to create '*shi* or tension between several characters or lines'; they can only rely on the characters they have to use to create *shi*. It is possible, in principle, to choose specific characters purely for calligraphic practice, and it also should be done. But in view of the close relation between characters and literature, and of the fact that those who are adept at Chinese calligraphy are usually fond of literature, it is in fact impossible to completely separate the two.

While creating equidistance between the columns and between the characters within a column, calligraphers also employ rhythm. But the main expressive element of *shi* lies in balance. The balance of *shi* has two aspects:

- (1) A uniform pattern or style. Zeng Guofan once said, 'Recently I often wrote big characters...but the vitality [within each of them] is not really linked together. That's because the structures of every single character are not uniform. Some characters are loose at the top and tense at the bottom, and some tense at the top and loose at the bottom. Some characters are big on the left and small on the right, and some big on the right and small on the left. All should be uniform throughout, and then a style could be formed.'<sup>63</sup> This explains that patterns should not be varied [in a work of calligraphy].
- (2) The 'centres of gravity' of all the characters in a column must roughly fall in a

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<sup>63</sup> Zeng Guofan, *Zeng Guofan Quanjì: Riji* (A Complete Collection of Zeng Guofan: Diary), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1994, 390.

straight line. In his *Diary*, Zeng Guofan once pointed out, ‘Some members of the Imperial Academy in Peking are skilled in writing on white accordion-form booklets (*zhezhi*), and tradition has it that there is a thread linking [all the characters] within a column. People who write big characters also need to get this point.’<sup>64</sup>

#### IV.

Up to now, this article has answered the first three questions raised in the first section. The only remaining question is: what is the aesthetic significance of the art of Chinese calligraphy? I plan to use the following three aesthetic categories to cover all the schools within the art of calligraphy:

- (1) Works that tend towards the beautiful.
- (2) Works that tend towards the sublime.
- (3) Works that contain both the beautiful and sublime.

Based on specific brushstroke techniques, each of these three classes can be further divided into some subclasses, and if it is needed, the subclasses could be separated into many types. After that, the characteristics of every class and every type will be clearly described. Unfortunately, the present writer has not yet done this due to ill health and studying overseas while writing this article means there is no access to rubbings and model calligraphies (*bei-tie*).<sup>65</sup> Besides the books this article cited, I have in hand no other theoretical books on calligraphy, so I can only wait for some future time to start this research. But I heartily wish that scholars in China would commence this research before me.

If what I have said in the above sections is not false, we can come to the following conclusion: Chinese calligraphy is an art with its own peculiarities, and is

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<sup>64</sup> Zeng Guofan, *Zeng Guofan Quanj: Riji* (A Complete Collection of Zeng Guofan: Diary), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 1994, 668.

<sup>65</sup> In Chinese calligraphy, *bei* refers to the stones that bear inscriptions, and *tie* originally referred to casual handwritten notes. For a discussion of *bei* and *tie*, see Lothar Ledderose, *Mi Fu and the Classical Tradition of Chinese Calligraphy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, 10-11.

equally valuable as the other arts.

Thus, Chinese calligraphy should get as much attention as the other arts. The past achievements of this art and the records of calligraphic techniques should be systematically collected and studied. Unfortunately, there has been no one up until now undertaking this research. If scholars in the future can embark on this career, the study of Chinese calligraphy will become a new research field of Chinese Studies. The subjects of this new area are as follows:

- (1) Valuable calligraphic works should be collected and photocopied on the basis of individuals, dynasties, or schools.
- (2) The authenticity of some works needs to be verified, and those works whose dates are unknown or questionable should be investigated and checked.
- (3) Critical biographies of calligraphers should pay special attention to their accomplishments, the chronology of their oeuvre, and the development of their skills.
- (4) Comparative studies of various calligraphic styles and schools should examine their differences, trace their origins and developments, and specify their gains and losses.
- (5) Theoretical writings on and practical manuals of Chinese calligraphy of successive dynasties need to be collected and researched.

The results of the above researches could be compiled into two books: *A History of Chinese Calligraphy* and *The Principles and Methods of Chinese Calligraphy*. Only after these two books are published, can the art of Chinese calligraphy thrive.

## Glossary of Chinese Terms

<i>bei</i> 碑: stele	<i>erjian</i> 耳鑒: judge by the ears
<i>beixue</i> 碑學: stele school	
<i>bifa</i> 筆法: techniques for using the brush	<i>fa</i> 法: method; technique; rule
<i>bishun</i> 筆順: the sequence of strokes	<i>fatie</i> 法帖: model calligraphies
<i>bian</i> 變: change, transformation	<i>fenbu</i> 分布: structure of the writing
<i>bian tai</i> 變態: change or transformation	<i>feng</i> 風: temper; animating force directed outward
<i>bihua</i> 筆畫: brushstroke	<i>fengqi</i> 風氣: elegant demeanor
<i>bishi</i> 筆勢: <i>shi</i> of the brush or brushstroke	<i>gong</i> 功: effort; technical attainments
<i>biyi</i> 筆意: the technique and spirit in brushstrokes	<i>gong</i> 工: skill, artistry; skillful, well-crafted
<i>bubai</i> 布白: arrangement of white	<i>gongfu</i> 工夫: technical skill
<i>bu jingyi</i> 不經意: having no thought	<i>gu</i> 骨: bone
<i>cao</i> 草: cursive script	<i>guan</i> 觀: to view; to observe
<i>chang</i> 常: convention; alignment with the past	<i>guanwo</i> 觀我: observe the self
<i>chidu</i> 尺牘: personal letters	<i>guanwu</i> 觀物: observe the things
	<i>gujin</i> 古今: past and present
<i>dangou</i> 單鉤: single-hook	<i>hui</i> 會: occasion
<i>de</i> 德: virtue	<i>jieti</i> 結體: structure of individual characters
<i>diao</i> 調: individuality	<i>jise</i> 疾澀: tardiness or harshness
<i>dutie</i> 讀帖: studying and contemplating masterworks	<i>jingshen</i> 精神: spirit
	<i>jinshi xue</i> 金石學: study of ancient

metal and stone objects	force; spirit; life-breath
<i>kai</i> 楷: regular script	<i>qi</i> 器: tools
<i>ke</i> 客: objective	<i>qi</i> 奇: strange, unusual
<i>kegong</i> 刻工: engraver	<i>qing</i> 情: emotion, feeling; sentiment
<i>kuangcao</i> 狂草: wild cursive script	<i>qing</i> 清: pure; spotless in conduct
	<i>qiyun</i> 氣韻: spirit consonance
	<i>qu</i> 趣: drift; flavour
<i>li</i> 力: strength, power	<i>qushi</i> 取勢: to pick out <i>shi</i>
<i>li</i> 隸: clerical script	
<i>linmo</i> 臨摹: copying	<i>ren shu guanxi</i> 人書關係: relation
	between an artist and his/her
<i>miao</i> 妙: marvellous	calligraphy
<i>miao pin</i> 妙品: marvellous class	<i>renpin</i> 人品: moral standing; moral
<i>miao shou</i> 妙手: highly skilled	quality
<i>ming ru qin du</i> 明如親睹: as clear as	<i>rou</i> 肉: flesh
one witnessed [the calligraphic	
creation]	<i>shang</i> 賞: appreciation
<i>mo</i> 墨: ink; brushwork	<i>shen</i> 神: spirit; essence of things;
<i>mofa</i> 墨法: methods of using the ink	inspired
<i>mujian</i> 目鑒: judge by the eyes	<i>shencai</i> 神彩: spiritual brilliance
	<i>shenfa</i> 身法: methods of the body
<i>nei</i> 內: internal	<i>shenhui</i> 神會: intuitive apprehension
<i>neng</i> 能: competent; able	<i>shenyu</i> 神遇: spiritual encounter
<i>neng pin</i> 能品: competent class	<i>shen pin</i> 神品: divine or inspired class
	<i>shi</i> 勢: force; dynamic configuration;
<i>pin</i> 品: moral quality; type,	potential; force-form
classification, gradation	<i>shi</i> 實: solid; substantial
<i>qi</i> 氣: intentional force; configurational	<i>shi</i> 時: an opportune time
	<i>shi yanzhi</i> 詩言志: poetry as an



articulation of what is on the mind  
*shi yuanying* 詩緣情: poetry as an  
 expression of emotion  
*shou* 手: hand  
*shu* 書: to write; calligraphy; script  
*shu* 數: chance  
*shu nu* 書奴: slave writer  
*shu pin* 書品: grading or classification  
 of calligraphy/calligrapher  
*shu ru qiren* 書如其人: calligraphy is  
 like the person  
*shuanggou* 雙鉤: double-hook  
  
*taben* 拓本: rubbing  
*ti* 體: body; embody; script  
*tianran* 天然: heavenly spontaneity  
*tie* 帖: handwritten piece on paper or  
 silk  
*tiexue* 帖學: copybook school  
*tong bian* 通變: continuity through  
 change; change though continuity  
  
*wai* 外: external  
*wan* 玩: plaything; to contemplate, to  
 appreciate; taking delight in  
*wen* 文: writing; pattern  
*wenren hua* 文人畫: literati painting  
*wu* 物: external things  
*wuwei* 無為: action by non-action

*wuxiang* 物象: images of things  
*wuyi* 無意: unintentional  
  
*xi* 習: practice  
*xiang* 象: images, emblematic symbols  
*xiangbei* 向背: face to face and back to  
 back  
*xiejing ti* 寫經體: sutra-writing style  
*xin* 心: mind; heart  
*xinjian* 心鑒: judge by the mind  
*xin shou shuang chang* 心手雙暢: mind  
 and hand acting in harmony  
*xinxiang* 心象: internal images  
*xin yi* 新意: new meanings or ideas  
*xing* 形: form; shape  
*xing* 行: running script  
*xing* 性: nature; disposition  
*xingqing* 性情: disposition  
*xingshi* 形式: form  
*xiushen* 修身: self-cultivation  
*xu* 虛: empty, void  
*xue* 血: blood  
  
*yi* 意: intention; idea  
*yi* 藝: art, craft  
*yi* 逸: unconstrained  
*yi pin* 逸品: unconstrained class  
*yi xing xie shen* 以形寫神: to describe  
 spirit through form

*yi zai bi xian* 意在筆先: mental  
 conception will come first and the  
 brush will follow  
*yixiang* 意象: idea-image  
*yongbi* 用筆: wield the brush; use of the  
 brush  
*youwei* 有為: intentional activity  
*youyi* 有意: intentional  
*yu gu wei tu* 與古為徒: being a  
 follower of the past  
*yun* 韻: manner; attitude; resonance  
*yunbi* 運筆: methods for moving the  
 brush  
  
*zhangfa* 章法: compositional  
 arrangement  
*zhen* 真: reality  
*zhen xing* 真行: running-standard script  
*zhenshang* 真賞: true appreciation  
*zhi* 志: mental disposition; will; state of  
 mind  
*zhibi fa* 執筆法: methods of grasping  
 the brush  
*zhu* 主: subjective  
*zhuan* 篆: seal script  
*zi cheng jia* 自成家: developed one's  
 own style  
*ziyun* 自運: self-operation

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